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Farewell 'Toinette!

FAREWELL 'TOINETTE

A Footnote to History

By BERTITA HARDING



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“**D**uring that late autumn I visited Castle Sibyllengard in Swabia and spent many hours with its master, Prince Rüdiger. The Prince, a dangerously charming man, knew my mother before me. He was an expert in strange pleasures, and from him I learned the following tale . . .”

CARLA, COUNTESS KAROLYI

to

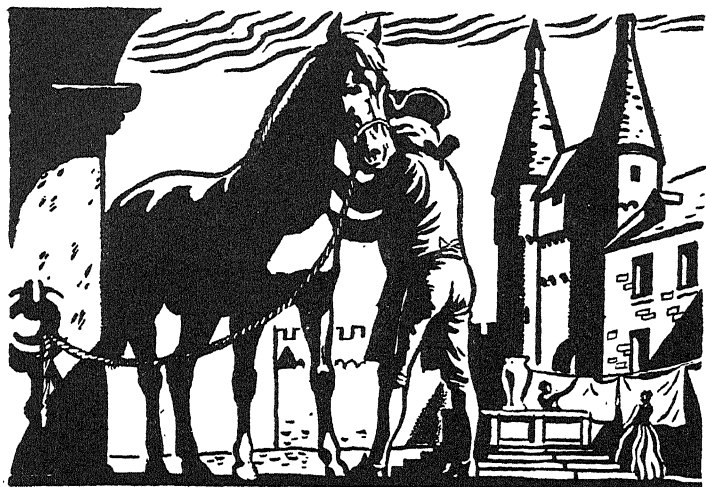
Hanna Bornhoeft de Leonarz

who is unlike all
stepmothers
in fairy tales

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Swabian Scene



THERE ARE places cloaked
in the fabric of dreams.

One comes upon them sometimes accidentally, often by surprise, yet always with an inner sense of recognition as though one had been destined to arrive there all along.

Such a place is Swabia, *Schwabenland* in the Württemberg vernacular, the duchy that lies bedded in the outstretched arms of Upper Danube, Neckar, Rhine and the north shore of Lake Constance above the Swiss cantons of Thürgau and St. Gallen. In the land of Swabia almost anything can happen, particu-

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larly the unexpected—which in time each native of the region learns to expect.

Surrounded by streams known to song and saga, crossed by the brooding Black Forest, the Jura Mountains and an Alpine foreland known as Rauhe Alb, this stretch of earth has been impregnated with a wealth of fantasy that forever creeps into the pattern of its everyday existence. Neither the growing factories of Esslingen, the Polytechnic Institute at Stuttgart nor the venerable University of Tübingen could invest the storied realm with more than a touch of realism, since behind every phase of progress there lurks the ineradicable racial memory of fabled and prehistoric things. In an unbroken chain the past is linked chimerically to the present, obtruding everywhere, engulfing even the casual visitor with an illusion of strange familiarity and a reverie of forgotten myths. In short, Swabia has ever been a disconcerting Kingdom of Cockaigne where all that is absurd, enchanting or preposterous could come to pass.

Certainly Duchess Frederica of Württemberg found it so. She had moved there during the middle of the Eighteenth Century from her girlhood home

Swabian Scene

in the adjoining province of Baden. She had found happiness beside an amiable husband, the reigning Duke Karl Eberhard. But Swabia baffled her. Frederica could never get used to it. She would grow old shaking her head in wonder at a place so stuffed with legend that the smallest happening gave rise to a chorused monition:

“And thereby hangs a tale . . .”

No event was too trivial for the woodman to lay down his axe, the mason his trowel, the soldier his lance, to engage in long-winded confabulation. Each knew a meaning behind some other meaning, a timely parallel, a dim folk-loric prophecy. For everyone in Swabia took great pride in perceiving that which the eye cannot see.

All of which annoyed the Duchess.

Take, for example, the matter of her spring palace-cleaning. A model wife and mother, Frederica administered her household with gusto and dispatch. Once a year she succumbed to a furious frenzy for pushing furniture about, chasing out bats and rodents, dusting Duke Karl's *escritoire* and generally setting the establishment on its ear. Most important of all,

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she ordered the featherbeds flung outdoors for a thorough beating.

It was at this point that the witched ambient of Swabia invariably manifested itself. However late in the season the eiderdowns came out, as soon as they appeared it snowed. Sometimes the Duchess employed guile. She waited until it was practically summer, but still the elements combined against her. The balmiest morning hid its smile at sight of Frederica's quilts.

It snowed.

Of course there would always be a Swabian explanation, which made no sense. Peasants, villagers and even palace servants agreed that it was all because of Frau Holle who lived under the earth and over the wind.

"Fiddlesticks!" said the Duchess. "How can anyone live under the earth and over the . . . well, fiddlesticks!"

But this did not stop the story-mongers in their recital of a hoary plot. Frau Holle, they narrated, was a witch who lived where she lived with two handmaidens, the industrious Yetta and the lazy Trude. Now whenever Yetta shook Frau Holle's bed and

Swabian Scene

punched the pillows to a gratifying fluffiness it snowed fine flakes all over *Schwabenland*; but if the indolent Trude performed the task in her slovenly fashion, black pitch and soot rained on the earth. It was as simple as that. Instead of frowning, housewives ought to rejoice at their luck in choosing a day when the good Yetta was rampant rather than her reprehensible sister.

Such dialectics, however, in no way soothed Frederica. She had little time for old wives' tales. Did not the welfare of Castle Sibyllengard rest on her shoulders?

It happened that this noble manor, crowning the village of the same name, was neither resplendent nor complex. It commanded a moat that had no water and a drawbridge that refused to draw. Shortly after Duke Karl's accession the portcullis had come down one day with a clang and declined thereafter to move on its hinges; whereupon the master of the castle, endowed with far-sight, reasoned that drawbridges were due soon to be going out of style. He landscaped the moat with trees and fragrant vines while anchoring the bridge by means of a picturesque arched gate of Baroque lines. This proved an architectural an-

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achronism. But lack of structural harmony was offset by speedy access to the ducal quarters as well as by a new insouciance toward the dangers of the world without. Unable to barricade his house, the lord of Sibyllengard dismissed mediæval fears and abandoned the isolation policy of austere feudal days.

The change was felt in every hamlet throughout the land, but most of all in the immediate neighborhood of the *Schloss*. Where formerly they had been awed by impenetrable walls, townsmen and villagers now passed the ducal abode with increasing eagerness, hoping for a glimpse of palace life within. They saw Duke Karl, often as not, dismount and rub down his own horse with a tattered blanket, or they perceived the Duchess marshalling her servants during the annual campaign against disorder. The sight of domesticity in high places began to form a novel link between the ruling and the ruled, dealing one of the earliest blows to a time-worn theory called the Divine Right of Kings. Certainly on the day the clothes-lines of Sibyllengard became exposed to public scrutiny the Duke and Duchess ceased to be a race apart.

But in the year 1765, which marked an extraordi-

Swabian Scene

nary happening, nobody at Sibyllengard was even remotely aware of this. In April of that year Duchess Frederica was busy fighting the elements; she had thrown open the windows for a gust of the warm vernal breeze. And it snowed. This threw her into a mood of dark despair.

More for the purpose of cheering her than because she had the faintest understanding of politics, Duke Karl diverted her attention from misery at home by discussing affairs abroad. He told her the news of the day as it was retailed at his favorite Stuttgart ale-house.

"My dear," he said brightly, "I hear that a way has been found to prevent future wars."

Frederica was not interested in methods for insuring peace; a rampage against the genii that controlled Swabian climate would have met with her whole-hearted support.

"You see," Duke Karl explained, "all wars are caused by the Austrians and the French."

"Why?" asked Frederica in spite of herself.

"They hate each other."

"But why do they hate each other?"

"Because they have *always* hated each other," af-

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firmed the Duke, a trifle irritated at his wife's obtuseness.

It was not very clear to Frederica. Still, male reasoning and logic were seldom very clear. So she passed it over and inquired somewhat listlessly about the peace plan. This was what her husband had been waiting for.

"The whole thing is quite simple," he announced. "The two countries are thinking of a dynastic marriage between the house of Hapsburg and that of Bourbon; a royal match always makes it bad manners to fight in the open."

Frederica pursed her lips. "That has been tried before. Look at Anne of Austria, wedded to that wicked Louis XIII! We've counted many a fray since then."

"Since then, yes," the Duke held his ground, "but while Anne was Queen——"

Even so he felt none too sure of himself, what with the endless squabbles that seemed to go on forever. Württemberg, lying between the two hostile powers, had always been the tramping ground for armies passing east or west. Pale Anne, during her brief French glory, had indeed not made much difference.

Swabian Scene

"However," continued the Duke, and when he said "however" Frederica knew something important was afoot, "they say it is the Empress Maria Theresia herself who will take matters in hand——"

"Maria Theresia!" gasped the Duchess. "My dear Karli, why didn't you say so in the first place?"

This changed the complexion of things. To the then known world the matriarch at Vienna was a symbol of decency and wifely virtue. Against Russia's incontinent and scandalous Catherine stood Hapsburg's sole champion of respectability, the hard-working amazon whose rule perhaps would not be equalled in the annals of that dynasty. If Maria Theresia wanted peace, something might truly come of it. . . .

"Well," Duke Karl finished proudly, "all I know is what people tell me, and they say the Empress has for some years had a proposition up her sleeve."

It was still snowing. But Frederica had relaxed. Her mind had been lifted across Swabia's borders toward that greater world where kings and statesmen toyed with the fate of nations. It was a world that scarcely took any cognizance of tiny Swabia; though, alas, the latter could not reciprocate. Like every

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buffer state, Swabia had suffered the anguish, famine and pestilence of seasoned belligerents. Never embroiled, it nonetheless had shared in every war of the century.

Hail, then, to any scheme that promised surcease! And a triple blessing upon the head of the brave dowager at Schönbrunn who dared to challenge Bourbons, Romanovs and Hohenzollerns with the glove of friendship. . . .

Duke Karl interrupted these ruminations. "I think," he mused, with a sidelong glance in his wife's direction, "that I had better go back to Stuttgart for more news."

Whereupon he straightened his peruke, brushed some powder off his vest, inhaled a mite of snuff and reached for his tricornered hat. By the time Frederica emerged sufficiently from her brown study to grasp the import of his words the lord of Sibyllengard had vanished. Leaning far out a window she barely caught a view of his coat tails flying.



Matters at Schönbrunn



ARCHDUCHESS MARIA
ANTONIA JOSEPHA
JOHANNA of Hapsburg was learning French.

Or perhaps that would be too much to say, for she was a lazy little girl, and after four years and a half of study the best she could do was to pronounce her name in the euphonious Parisian fashion in which history would one day pronounce it: Marie Antoinette.

Marie Antoinette. . . . It lent itself to a pretty nickname—'Toinette. Yes, that was better than Maria Antonia. Even as Josephine glorified Josepha, while Jeanne—who could deny the merits of Jeanne against

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a stodgy Germanic Johanna? Nobody. And for that matter, nobody did, although this was hardly for aesthetic reasons. Rather did concerted approval spring from the purest political motive, for the young Archduchess had been destined to become Dauphiness and future Queen of France. Her mother, the widowed Empress Maria Theresia of Austria, was plotting the match; her prospective fiancé's grandfather, the widowed Louis XV, would contribute his blessing. It did not occur to anyone to question small 'Toinette in the matter, and so, at the age of ten—a tender olive branch linking two nations—she found herself theoretically betrothed.

The Dauphin was twelve. He went under the name of Duc de Berry and was the eldest grandson of Louis XV and the latter's Polish consort, Marie Leszczinska. Being left fatherless at an early age, the Duc de Berry ranked as heir to the Bourbon crown. He and Marie Antoinette had never met, but dynastic plans were not foiled by so trifling a consideration as that. Lights seldom burned in bridal chambers anyway. And no married couple ever got really acquainted until after the honeymoon.

The actual betrothal ceremony was yet to take

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place; but, meanwhile, 'Toinette's French lessons had begun. In this connection Maria Theresia committed a slight error. Being a bit parsimonious, she was reluctant to import an expensive foreign tutor for her daughter. A theatrical company from Lausanne lingered at the moment in Vienna, running through its repertoire of Gallic plays. What could be simpler than to engage a pair of hungry Thespians, one for diction and one for song, thereby doubling the Archduchess' accomplishments while cutting the cost in half? The Empress, always a good manager, felt pleased.

Her pleasure did not last long. News of the arrangement soon leaked out and was carried to Paris, where it created something of a stir. The future *Dauphine* of France being tutored by comedians? And in that abominable French mouthed by the Swiss! It would never do. A caustic correspondence between Versailles and Schönbrunn ensued.

Awed by the Bourbon wrath, Maria Theresia of course gave in. The marriage project was dear to her heart and she dared not relinquish it. Politically a union between the two rival dynasties was of the utmost importance, since Austria's well-being no less

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than her territorial expansion had ever depended upon the forging of alliances in preference to tools of war.

By giving in, the Empress stooped to conquer. She wrote Louis XV an assuaging letter with a postscript. The postscript contained a salute to Madame Dubarry, the King's latest mistress (since the death of La Pompadour) and current scandal of Versailles. This proved a brilliant piece of strategy, for the French sovereign, overwhelmed by such good manners on the part of Austria, forthwith obliged by seeking out a suitable teacher—one Abbé Vermond—who was dispatched instanter to Schönbrunn. Since Paris taxpayers defrayed the Abbé's honorarium, Maria Theresia's gambit had been very astute. Neatly the Empress pulled her purse strings shut.

She had to loosen them again, almost at once. A smattering of vocabulary and a dash of syntax might all be very well, the new tutor announced, but what about other accomplishments befitting a princess? Could the Archduchess play the harpsichord? Could she embroider, paint on porcelain, dance? Alas, 'Toinette could do none of these things. Of all the imperial children (Maria Theresia had given birth to sixteen) none was more heedless, idle and contrary

Matters at Schönbrunn

than small 'Toinette who knew absolutely nothing and cared less—except perhaps in the matter of dancing, to which the child's fine ankles and dainty figure obviously predisposed her. It was to further this lone talent, then, that a ballet master named Noverre arrived at court. Daily the palace floors resounded and the ceilings shook with the violence of his caprioles and pirouettes which, it must be admitted, delighted the young princess. Whenever the zealous teacher whirled and bestirred himself into a sweat, 'Toinette stood happily by, a beaming smile on her rose-petal face. Occasionally she pointed her toes or took a step, but for the most part she was far too dazzled by the antics of Monsieur Noverre to engage in any calisthenics of her own. It was only when the Empress entered the ballet studio, which had been quartered in the old nursery wing, that matters changed and 'Toinette leaped spryly about. For Maria Theresia took her own dancing seriously; though well past middle age, she executed a brisk polka, nor was she averse to purloining a curvet and a caper or two from the repertoire of her daughter's instructor.

Vermond meanwhile had charge of such cultural subjects as the customs and manners (though not

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morals) currently in fashion at Versailles. He also taught history, religion, grammar, orthography, literature and the genealogy of the nobility of France. Since all these subjects were crowded into a single hour of daily tutelage, teacher and pupil did not have a very irksome time of it. It was only to be marveled at that young 'Toinette learned anything at all.

She was not a stupid child. On the contrary, her mind showed a swift and keen perception of the world into which she had been born. She had a true dynastic instinct, natural poise and—very rare in one so youthful—an astonishingly sharp sense of humor. Warmhearted in the extreme, she loved animals and engaged in a perpetual hunt for pets. Soon after the Abbé Vermond had been installed in Schönbrunn he encountered in the composition books used by his charge an ever recurring sentence:

"Je voudrais un petit chien Mops." ("I would like a little pug dog.")

Nobody ever gave her a pug dog, but this was not for her lack of saying that she wanted one. She said so again and again, year after year, in her atrocious schoolgirl script.

On her thirteenth birthday, however, they gave her

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a dentist. And on her fourteenth a hairdresser. The latter, known as Monsieur Larsenneur, was noted for what he could do about ladies cursed with high foreheads—and young 'Toinette showed every sign of growing into such a lady. To everyone's disgust her brow bulged mightily above wide grey-green eyes which rested with a steady challenging stare on all they beheld. Maria Theresia could have wept over that white expanse topping her daughter's face. Not even a fringe of bangs could remedy the flaw, since the hair would have to be brought down so low that there was nothing left with which to build the indispensable chignon. But Larsenneur the Great, the Inimitable, would discover a way out. Larsenneur did.

"What?" he exclaimed with drama. "High foreheads, they are not the style? *Eh bien*, one will cause public taste to change. La Pompadour, she wore her hair straight back; we shall go further—we shall wear it *up*!"

With swift manipulation of comb and brush he swept 'Toinette's blonde tresses into a towering line, piling each lock high above those grey-green eyes so that the cumulative effect served only to exaggerate

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both length and width of skull. And presto, the vast uncovered brow became the fashion; a world of gaping females followed suit. While ordinarily the hairdress of an adolescent girl could in no way have affected the universal mode, Larsenneur was like a potter who discriminates before touching his clay. He well knew that this child of Austria had been chosen to be Queen of France and therefore Queen of Fashion; even before the butterfly was hatched it well behooved the feminine world to watch the chrysalis.

He was not wrong. Presently princesses, soubrettes, milkmaids, cocottes, midwives and shepherdesses took up the daring mode. In some cases the new coiffure entailed considerable pain. For there were those who, equipped with but an inch of brow, perforce must pluck out hairs or have them shaved to achieve the proper line. Even Madame Dubarry sponsored the "intellectual" silhouette inspired by a Viennese maid who, ironically, would one day symbolize the least intellectual society of her time.

As far as 'Toinette herself was concerned, the Larsenneur creation did not prove an unmixed blessing; it took two hours to construct and half an hour to tear down, not to mention the twenty minutes or so

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required for powdering. It was the tedious process of powdering the scalp which 'Toinette detested most of all. Not only did flying particles of flour tickle her nose and call forth constant sneezing spells, but the layer of whiteness covered up all the shiny gold of her natural tresses.

Yet how to escape the established ritual? This was the age of the Rococo, an era feverishly embattled against old age. Grey hair was deemed the universal *bête noire*. To lay this ghost of greying hair men had devised a shrewd measure: the dousing of all heads, whether young or old, with rice-meal or pulverized chalk. Senility, where is thy sting? So ran the unspoken challenge of the day. If babes in arms could be made hoary to behold, their grandsires would have no need to fear the mirror.

Thus came about that strange historic pageant of wizened humanity—a spectacle of boys and girls in snowy wigs and solemn adult attire calculated to dispel for their quaking elders life's only terror: death.

Powdered and trussed up in a costume of silken ruffles, puffs and flounces, the child became a lady. She prattled her scant list of French phrases, danced a

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tolerable minuet, took lessons on the spinet under Cristophe Willibald Gluck and listened to the thirteen-year-old prodigy, Mozart, who currently was concertizing at Schönbrunn.

In addition to these cultural pursuits there were the masques and comedies performed almost nightly under the auspices of Maria Theresia. The Empress loved amateur theatricals. She acted (quite badly) herself and saw to it that no member of her court escaped memorizing an occasional rôle. She directed vociferously and often took a hand in painting scenic props. Her children (six of the original sixteen had died very young) were all versed in the art of mimicry, for it was Her Majesty's fondest dream to establish on her premises a temple to the Muses, with repertoire, personnel and miniature orchestra supplied out of the bosom of her family.

During the lifetime of her husband, Franz von Lothringen, this had not been easy to achieve. For the good Franz, a native of Lorraine and a hypochondriac to boot, was somewhat dour. He had no use for either chamber music or the solemn recitation of Homeric verse, much less frivolous choreographic antics. He particularly detested Noverre, the toe-

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dancer. Feet, opined the querulous Franz, were to be walked on squarely and not to be poised topwise on their tenderest point for the performance of senseless gyrations. Whenever Noverre spun neatly across the footlights the imperial consort winced at thinking how his bunions ought to hurt.

Though nominated Holy Roman Emperor, Franz I had hardly ever been more than the husband of his wife. It was Maria Theresia who, through birthright alone, rather than marriage, called herself Empress. She had been the daughter and sole heir of Kaiser Karl VI, last male Hapsburg of the original Kyffhausen line. She never forgot it. Nor did the foreign Franz. Yet in his unimportant way he made a mark. For he brought something to this house that awed him with its past; he gave it what it lacked—a future. Having done so, he passed quietly out of the picture, leaving behind him the impressive proof of his conjugal efforts: a handsome brood. Marie Antoinette was only nine years old when her father died.

To simplify matters of ceremonial, Austrian law decreed that there must be another emperor. As a result Maria Theresia's eldest son was appointed to share the throne as Joseph II. This put the young

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man in no better position than that of his father before him, since the Empress alone continued to hold sway.

Joseph's rôle, despite sovereign titles, remained that of a restive crown prince who is marking time. Occasionally he led his favorite regiment in a parade or he laid a cornerstone. He hunted boars and stags, won trophies for equestrian feats or called attention by falling from his horse. Then there were fashions to set in hats, neckwear or breeches, besides which Joseph argued with his mother's ministers, opened cathedrals, visited hospitals and christened an imperial windjammer. He also kissed babies and danced with waitresses in shady pubs. In short, he suffered the malady peculiar to every heir to a crown, a plague called: Waiting.

The foremost symptom of this morbid state is manifested in a sorely punctured ego. A crown prince is forever being reminded of the crown. He is tantalized by visions of the day when he may wear it. Yet if he but reaches out a tentative hand to grip the sceptre—merely in the spirit of a rehearsal, of course—he finds his fingers severely rapped. This is very exasperating.

To cover up his embarrassment the typical crown

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prince never mentions the crown; in fact, he says he doesn't want it. This always pleases the people. As soon as a crown prince comes out saying that he doesn't want the crown everybody feels confident that Utopia is near, for, however bad present oppressors may be, it seems certain that no despot lurks around the corner. At last the world will see a sovereign who hates power and can hardly bear to have it thrust upon him! It is wonderful.

Almost every crown prince believes this himself. As a result history has seldom witnessed an unpopular royal heir, except where one happened to be foolish enough to show his true colors.

Joseph was not foolish. He knew that every hale and hearty human being loves power, and that the voluntarily cowed-shirking-shrinking violet belongs in a low-vitality group of subnormal fungi. But he also knew that the rest of mankind, itself forever consumed with petty ambition, could be held spellbound by one who pretended not to feel its bite. Such a one, standing aside, indifferent to the game, contemptuous of its goal, was lifted beyond the range of blistering passions. Men saw in him no rival. Good fellow! Hurrah!

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Joseph stood aside. In the shadow of his mother's omnipotence he walked as meekly as an apostle. But he took care to walk where he might be seen. While Maria Theresia remained at home, secluded and aloof in her majesty, he frequented the streets and made it clear—in an unassuming way—that he was a true *Volks-Kaiser*, the People's Emperor.

He loved to go about incognito, since part and parcel of crown-princely legends is the preference for mufti over ostentatious uniform. This always led to dramatic climaxes when one was recognized while hiding in a crowd, a performance at which Joseph was particularly good. In fact, he worked (as hard as anyone who ever stood in his position) for the one balm against the prick of subordination, popularity. Let those in power tighten the reins, tormenting him with spur and bridle. He would employ his idleness, his vast ennui, to vengeful ends. He would go out and win the masses by playing to the gallery; private theatricals at Schönbrunn had taught him the technique of scene-stealing.

The masses were not hard to win. To a man, all Vienna, and presently all Austria, came to be carried away by the handsome lad who appeared at country

fairs or village beer gardens to share the simple burgher's life. His kindly deeds, a gold coin here, a cravat there, a promise of improvement somewhere else, brought plaudits in their train.

Unwittingly, Joseph became a forerunner to that quaint Hapsburg phenomenon, the Biedermeier Emperors. (The German adjective "*bieder*" means "upright" or "righteous"—sometimes, as is the way with virtue, to an offensive degree. The name "*Meier*," being very common, has long been a symbol for the common man.) Joseph would have felt quite proud of such a sobriquet which stamped him as a brother and friend to all. It furnished, without loss of aristocratic privileges or pin-money, the pleasure of nibbling at proletarian crusts. Assured of nation-wide salutes, one could afford to play the great handshaker.

Joseph did not fool his mother. No crown prince ever does. Maria Theresia knew quite well that, once her portly figure lay shrouded in a gilt Rococo coffin, Joseph would cast aside his modest mummery. Far from tossing the sceptre on the ash heap, his itching palm would snatch it eagerly. With almost unseemly haste he would gallop up the steps to that throne which, fleeting memory might recall, was being

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forced upon him. There he would be, a sovereign, notwithstanding all he had done to prevent himself from bowing to the yoke. Ho, ho, ho! It gave Maria Theresia a huge laugh.

She sometimes taunted her son. With scathing irony she would recount a tale that was fast taking hold of popular fancy. It was the charming saga of a darkly garbed stranger who appeared unexpectedly in the most expected places, there to perform startling deeds of charity. At the conclusion of each episode a singular thing happened. Unfurling the civilian's cloak that masked him, the stranger reluctantly exposed his court dress and be-spangled breast, even to the Order of the Golden Fleece.

"Begone," his lips spoke eloquently, "for you will never know my name. I am the Emperor Joseph . . ."

All Saints and Seven Sinners—how Maria Theresia laughed!

Joseph did not mind. He knew that popular intelligence would miss the point. The gullibility of the masses found no pill too large, no herring too red, to swallow. Look at the novels people read, the plays they went to see! Did not the formula, the trite and

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predigested ending, show blatantly through every mesh and criss-cross of the flimsy fabric? Maria Theresia might have her sport with ambiguity and *double entendre*; Joseph was confident nonetheless that his amiable subjects thrilled to the benefactor whose identity they were not supposed to know.

He banked on crowd psychology. The masses were always willing to co-operate in any game of make-believe; they never failed to gulp the bait and to run with it as far as it would go.

There was an ancient snare for catching an ostrich, whereby the catcher waited for his prey to bury its head in sand before he stalked about shouting: "I wonder where that ostrich went?"

In much this fashion the genial Viennese played Blind Man's Buff with their masked emperor and he with them. It was the age-old way of fairy tales, already memorized by the listener, yet harkened to with everlasting faith.

At eighteen, Joseph was Prince Charming to all the Cinderellas of his realm. Ladies from every rank and station fancied themselves in love with him, a condition not difficult to understand in view of his dashing

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and romantic exterior. Letters and many a *billet-doux* fluttered across his path with the profusion of peach blossoms in spring. He read them all with undeniable pleasure.

Then, at nineteen, he married the long-faced Duchess Isabella of Parma, whereupon his fan mail ceased. Quite abruptly the feminine world cast off its idol. Women began to say they didn't know what anyone had seen in him before, or else they wondered what he saw in his nondescript wife.

The wedding was celebrated at Schönbrunn, in 1760, with all the traditional pomp for which such ceremonies were noted. The bride stepped briefly into the equivocal position of a consort to a future emperor whose mother remained empress, but she conveniently died before the conundrum of her official status could be solved. Thus, at a youthful age, Joseph once again became an eligible bachelor and Prince Charming to all the Cinderellas of his realm. Ladies from every rank and station fancied themselves in love with him, a condition not difficult to understand in view of his continued dashing and romantic exterior.

Even the little 'Toinette was entranced by her

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brother, for his flair to make himself agreeable abroad worked also in the home. He practiced on his family. There were six sisters and three brothers to charm, and Joseph charmed them all. He sometimes overshot his mark and earned fraternal catcalls, but on the whole his policy of winning friends and influencing people succeeded admirably. Only on rare occasions did friends revolt or odious people show themselves impervious to influence.

It happened that in the imperial circle 'Toinette was Joseph's favorite, although there existed between them a gap of over fourteen years. The other sisters, Maria Anna, Maria Elisabeth, Maria Christine, Maria Amalia and Maria Karoline, were older and less colorful in personality. The Empress had a hard time disposing of them; she fretted a great deal, as every good mother should, about their respective futures. Maria Anna had been born a hunchback, a fact which practically eliminated marriage as a prospect and left only the refuge of convent walls. After some embarrassment the Empress settled this problem by appointing her misshapen daughter to the post of abbess over the Noble Ladies of the Hradschin in Prague.

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Maria Elisabeth, the beauty of the family, seemed at first to be destined for a brilliant career. But Fate decreed otherwise. The debonair King Stanislas Poniatovsky of Poland had for a time shown an amorous interest in the girl, only to receive sharp warning from Catherine the Great that Russia would frown upon an Austro-Polish alliance. Next, though only half-heartedly, Maria Theresia had offered her handsome daughter to the dissolute and aging Louis XV of France after the latter's queen (with Pompadour, his best-known mistress) had passed on to eternity. The reprobate Bourbon, however, had already made other arrangements which were more to his liking than wedlock; he chose Madame Dubarry—lately of the Paris slums—who was neither as young nor as exquisite as the Hapsburg princess, though she had points to recommend her. At about this time Maria Elisabeth fell prey to smallpox, which so ravaged her face and body that she dared not show herself again in public. She was twenty-four years old when the dread scourge transformed her into a thing of horror. Once more maternal ingenuity was called upon for action and the Empress did not falter. She combed her states for further nunneries until she came at last

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upon the proper choice. Within the year of her ghastly illness the pock-marked maid took her vows as abbess over the Noble Ladies of Innsbruck in the Tyrol.

The trio of girls, Maria Christine, Maria Amalia and Maria Karoline, fortunately gave their mother less trouble. Each found a husband, though none could be said to have made a splendid match. And each departed for foreign parts, the first for Holland, the second for Parma, the third for Naples. They were settled and immured against that bane of womanhood, a spinster's lot. But the empress in Maria Theresia was not proud of them.

With five archduchesses who had brought no glory to the imperial house it became a matter of some stringency that young 'Toinette redeem Hapsburg prestige. She must make an important marriage even if it cost the last ounce of her mother's self-respect, which it very nearly did. Thus, when 'Toinette was barely nine, the Empress had started campaigning.

A Russian grand duke would have been most welcome. But were there any genuine Romanovs left? The mighty Catherine (a German princess of Anhalt-Zerbst) had only recently dethroned her husband,

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Tsar Peter III, and cast him in the path of his assassins. Her son Paul, one year older than 'Toinette, was said to have been sired by a pug-nosed grenadier named Sergei Saltikov.

An English prince might also prove acceptable. But George III's first-born, "Prinny," was scarcely out of diapers when he was first approached on the matter of his preference in a wife. To which the small Prince of Wales made but one answer, an ear-splitting bawl.

Prussia was of course out of the question, since a Hapsburg could not wed an upstart Hohenzollern.

There remained the Bourbons, the all-important Bourbons! Maria Theresa was still smarting under the rebuff dealt by Louis XV to her daughter Elisabeth. Could she strangle her pride and negotiate with France for the King's grandson, the Dauphin? She could, and without scruple. For Maria Theresa was the shrewdest politician of her time.

Quite as if nothing had happened to mar the harmony between Versailles and Schönbrunn, the Empress inquired about the Dauphin's health and his future plans, if any. To which, since only his grandson's freedom and not his own would be at stake,

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Louis XV made a most amenable reply. What, he questioned cheerfully, had Austria in mind? This put things on a workable basis and Maria Theresia lost no time presenting her case. She sent her Ambassador to France, Count Florimund Claude Mercy-Argenteau, to Paris with a portfolio of miniatures and crayon sketches showing her youngest daughter's charms. It was on viewing these that Louis XV had exclaimed:

"But her forehead—*mon Dieu, c'est formidable*—what a forehead!"

Mercy-Argenteau, noting the royal disapproval, had thereupon set out to find the brilliant Larsenneur, whose artful ways with brush and comb would soon transform 'Toinette's defects into a magnificent asset.

Other improvements followed, such as the dancing lessons, some effective conceits in corsetry, and a smattering of French grammar. Before long the bride-elect would muster all specifications.

She could be queen.

Almost five years had gone by since those early exertions and Empress Maria Theresia was beginning to worry. True, her daughter had indubitably been af-

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fianced to the French Dauphin. She wore a ring bearing the Bourbon lily. But there were no audible Bourbon signs denoting an eagerness to carry out the pledge. From Paris came no inkling or tinkling of wedding bells.

Maria Theresia was frankly alarmed. Herself a conscientious Germanic *Hausfrau*, she had spent many months preparing 'Toinette's dowry. The robes, lace underthings, furs, hand-sewn boots and bonnets for the bride filled every cupboard at Schönbrunn. For, despite her own love of economies, the Empress could not afford to stint on this occasion.

But what were they doing in France? Had they so much as set a date and planned the wedding feast? Were any guests invited? A stony silence met these questions. Versailles had nothing to say. And since 'Toinette and her absent Dauphin had never met or corresponded, these two had also nothing to say.

At last the impatient mother could contain herself no longer. Taking the bit between her teeth she pranced forth in a rampant mood and called upon the new French Ambassador to Vienna, Marquis Emmanuel Felicité de Durfort, who had just recovered from a heavy cold. Huddled in a bathrobe, with his

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feet immersed in a tub of steaming water, the Marquis begged for postponement of the interview. But Her Majesty was tired of postponements. She had come to speak her mind. Neither Durfort's wriggling toes nor his abundant sneezes would keep her from speaking it.

The interview was by no means pleasant, for the Empress was not one to mince words. With suitors clustering 'round, seeking her daughter's hand, it was impossible to keep 'Toinette indefinitely committed to an uncertain troth. A Hapsburg archduchess, so the Marquis learned, had never been kept waiting. (This was hardly true, since imperial brides are jilted with no less ease than their proletarian sisters. But it lent itself to a scathing crescendo which, in the stentorian baritone of Maria Theresia, quite demolished the Marquis.)

After the verbal joust Durfort retired to a private study and composed a letter to his king. Couched in innocuously diplomatic terms, it nevertheless conveyed with complete accuracy the nature of the imperial demands.

Louis XV read the missive and raised astonished eyebrows. *Parbleu*, that wedding! He had forgotten

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all about it. . . . One must call Choiseul and learn from him what had transpired those many years ago. Choiseul had been Foreign Minister since the time of the negotiations with Austria. If anyone, he ought to know what France was to do in this dilemma.

The Duc de Choiseul knew. Discord with Maria Theresia, at a moment when Prussia was rising to power under that impertinent Frederick, surnamed the Great, would bring misfortune to the house of Bourbon. Decidedly the long-projected marriage between "*cette petite Marie Antoinette*" and the French Dauphin must be looked upon as an unmitigated blessing.

Louis XV nodded a gentle, slightly indifferent nod. It was not that he had ever intended offending Maria Theresia or that he objected to an Austrian archduchess in the family circle. It was merely that he didn't give a cucumber for family circles. Although many times a father, he was not in the least paternal. Amorous sports absorbed him utterly, but he resented their ultimate purpose of procreation. That universal preoccupation of dynasts, the timely arrival of an heir, never pricked him. For he was quite content with life in the present tense. Whatever came after

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Louis XV did not matter. At least, not to Louis XV.

Since it mattered to Choiseul, however, and to that skittish Austrian Empress, the King would certainly co-operate. Let them go ahead with wedding preparations. Let them present him with the bills. See if he cared! The treasury of France would pay.

Choiseul took these instructions and sped away to pen a detailed answer to Durfort. As a parting comment Louis cried after him:

"Tell them my grandson is a fool, but they can have him. . . ."

To which the diplomat agreed with a deep bow.

Important news was rushed that night toward Vienna. Within a week Maria Theresia held in her hands the joyful reassurance that at Versailles a pledge was still a pledge. Exulting in this triumph, she turned at once to more practical considerations and asked for a date. Again the diplomatic pouch traveled back and forth with urgent dissertations and the final agreement on a day in the late spring of 1770. To satisfy both parties there would be a proxy wedding at Schönbrunn before the bride set out for the actual ceremony in France.

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"Doppelt genäht hält besser" ("A double seam holds better"), quoth Her Majesty with prudent insight. One never knew about those flighty French.

Now that the great event drew noticeably nearer, the Empress took her daughter more severely in hand. The fourteen-year-old girl was to be taken into her mother's confidence on a few items pertaining to conjugal life. To this end 'Toinette's narrow bedstead was pushed into the Empress' room where, in nightly conversations, some stirring revelations were to occur.

For three months Maria Theresia groped and fumbled, like every conscientious mother before or after her, for a proper way of "talking to" her marriageable child. She had been through this several times before, with the same net result of getting nowhere at all. After some ineffectual references to flowers and bees, to pollen and other beautiful secrets (which had no bearing on the point, since the Archduchess was neither a vegetable nor an insect) there would come a poignant pause. During this pause Her Majesty fell prey to vapors and other grave discomforts of the inhibited human frame. Behind the barricade of her featherbed the Empress choked. She gulped

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and floundered in the dark. And in the end life's gross and lusty realities remained unspoken.

Nor was 'Toinette of any help. Many a daughter in the same exigency takes pity on parental blushes by soundly ventilating the latest views on sex and giving the mater a pointer or two. But at fourteen 'Toinette's own chastity was genuine. So much so that the girl generally dropped off to sleep before the nightly sermon started. Had she but known it, Maria Theresia might have saved herself many a modest pang.

One thing, however, was impressed upon the puzzled Archduchess; namely, that it was very good to have a dozen children. Two dozen would be better still.

"Myself, I had sixteen," Maria Theresia admitted deprecatingly.

'Toinette yawned drowsily. All her life she had known that there were once sixteen of them (with somebody being put away in a small white coffin now and then).

Well, what was she to do about that? Mama was certainly funny, always repeating herself and mentioning the same threadbare commonplace facts. And

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anyway, a dozen children—how were they to come about, supposing one wished them to come about? Why didn't Mama explain that? Goodness, the gaps in Mama's conversation! The way she skipped from one thing to the next without telling what caused such things in the first place. . . .

Two dozen children! When all 'Toinette wanted was a little pug dog. . . .

With the wedding date at last clearly in view, an inventory had to be taken to determine the bride's current supplies and future needs. Already the imperial chests and clothes-presses were bulging with feathers, bonnets, petticoats and pantalettes, but still fresh orders poured in. From famous Mecheln came tons of bobbin lace for nightgowns and fichus, while Hungary sent the finest calf and deer skins to be cut into scalloped, button-topped shoes. Then there were capes, wraps, fur chokers and muffs for the long journey across Germany to France, a journey so colossal that at the mere contemplation of it Maria Theresia's heart set up a wild tattoo.

Of course she could not accompany her daughter on this trip. She was Empress; she had her job. Her

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concept of a sovereign allowed for no respite from duty, not even to escort a fourteen-year-old child to foreign lands from which there would be no return. Parting in those days was both grim and final. People knew this and braced themselves against it.

Even so, 'Toinette was not to travel alone. Her brother, Emperor Joseph, would go along as far as Kloster Melk on the Danube, while the younger Archdukes bade their sister farewell at the gates of Vienna. (The latter were: Leopold, already singled out to be Grand Duke of Tuscany; Ferdinand, due to impersonate the Dauphin at 'Toinette's proxy wedding; and Maximilian, the baby of the family, too small as yet to do anything at all.)

Besides the Emperor a vast cortège of nobles, courtiers, ladies-in-waiting and footmen would accompany the bride. They were to travel as far as Kehl, near Strassburg, where they must turn back without crossing the Rhine or setting foot on French territory, since the little Archduchess was expected to cast off all Austrian and Germanic ties before entering her new realm. On an island in the middle of the stream the Bourbon deputation would await her, with a retinue of courtiers and ladies who were to replace the

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Schönbrunn staff. Turning from dear familiar faces, 'Toinette would undress and, stark naked, step across a symbolic line into the presence of the strangers who were delegated to cloak her in the finery of Versailles. For years to come Maria Theresia would feel a trifle bilious at sight of the trunks brimming with millinery, camisoles, panniers and corselets besides the mass of silk ribbon and bobbin lace which poor 'Toinette had not been able to take into France.

Altogether a cavalcade of three hundred and forty horses surrounded the four dozen carriages that were assembled for the bridal train. Weeks in advance of the extraordinary expedition messengers were sent abroad to clear the highways so that there would be no hitch in the procession, once it rumbled laboriously under way. Anxious court secretaries in their peri-wigs calculated distances and laid out the exact itinerary to be followed en route. They computed how many days the caravan would require and where it ought to stop each night. This led to complications, since only major cities would be able to accommodate such an army of transients on short notice. Thus the cortège would have to sacrifice pageantry for more practical considerations by dividing into several

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small groups. Again Maria Theresia's flair for dramatic effects suffered a serious setback.

But at least in Vienna affairs would run according to schedule. The old Church of the Augustines was lighted and festooned for the *per procuracionem* or proxy ceremony. On April 19th, 1770, in the great nave above the vaults where her ancestors lay buried, Archduchess Maria Antonia Josepha Johanna of Hapsburg married her brother Ferdinand. Or rather, since God and the officiating clergy had been drawn into dynastic confidence, she married an absent and invisible Duc de Berry who was Dauphin of France.

After this performance the entire wedding party of several hundred persons swarmed to the residence of Marquis Durfort who, as envoy extraordinary and plenipotentiary, must hold the first reception. But plenipotency has its limits; at least, this was true of the building in which the French Ambassador happened to be housed. It could not possibly hold such an overflow of guests. As a result carpenters hastily nailed up tents and wood pavilions to right and left of the main structure, while the harassed Marquis was threatened with apoplexy for fear there would not be enough punch to go around. But in the end it was a

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marvelous party which lasted far into the morning hours. The most merriment of all was had when a sudden storm came up and one of the tents caved in.

The following day was spent in a round of official duties such as the hearing of every provincial deputation which had come to take leave of the "last princess." 'Toinette discovered with a parting pang that out in that impersonal entity known as the realm she had many friends. They had come, all these peasants and tradesmen in their Sunday clothes, because they loved her. People she never knew existed were blessing her now and wishing her a happy life.

Slowly she began to realize what it would mean to say goodbye to her own kinsmen, to her home and country. Great tears welled up into her eyes. Since handkerchiefs had not yet been invented (weepers employed their lingerie or sleeves when in distress) she pulled off the square lace fichu that topped her dress and with it wiped her drenched cheeks. The spasm of grief would not leave her, so she held the bit of cloth clenched tightly in her little fists.

It was thus that, some hours later at the Opera, Durfort discovered her in the act of violently blow-

ing her pert nose. The Marquis blinked and pressed forward to look again. He could hardly believe his eyes. How *distingué*, he mused, how utterly exquisite! To think that Her Imperial Highness possessed a something intended for this very purpose. . . . It was epochal, not to say *formidable*! He must write home about it.

"If Your Majesty can contrive to imagine," went the report to Louis XV, "a bit of muslin with four corners and an edging made of *valenciennes*, which Madame La Dauphine did employ to advantage. . . ."

Entirely unaware that she not only had started a fashion but was adding a noteworthy rung to civilization's ladder, 'Toinette dried up her sniffles. Not knowing what to do with the fichu, she crumpled it into a ball and stuffed it down into the bosom of her gala robe. There it reposed just as, through centuries of crumpling, other square bits of muslin continue to repose.

On the evening of her last day in Austria a family supper was arranged at Schönbrunn. There were to be no guests present, not even members of the court. Only 'Toinette, her brothers and the Empress would gather about the long oak table where, through

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the years, they had happily shared each meal. Tonight the supper was not gay, although Maria Theresia strove valiantly to make small talk. With sheepish glances the Archdukes regarded their young sister, who sat in all the array of her gorgeous finery. Already she began to seem a little strange to them. Already she was strange to herself.

Then came darkness and the last night under the parental roof. To think that one must say goodbye even to one's bed!

'Toinette fell softly back on her pillow. Through glistening lashes she could see her mother climb out of creaking stays and into a voluminous nightgown. Next, the Empress knelt down on a prie-dieu and, with hands folded across her mammoth breasts, engaged in earnest conversation with God. Only when this was done did she return to earthly business. Puffing up her cheeks, Her Majesty blew out the candle.

"A queen," said Maria Theresia firmly and with that perseverance which characterized her, "can do nothing better than to have as many children as possible."

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She nestled back into the pillows while with a series of light pats she smoothed her coverlet. The bedstead creaked.

"And furthermore," the Empress specified, "they ought to be boys."

She was speaking French without being aware of it. All day she had spoken French because of the foreign guests. Besides, for many months her mind had been keyed to Gallic matters so that it was difficult even to think in other terms.

'Toinette did not mind. Ever since Christmas the Schönbrunn household had ceased to address her in German so that she might be compelled to practice her new tongue. She was getting used to it. More than that, she enjoyed the way Mama was getting used to it. For Mama fancied herself something of a linguist and everyone could see that the little compulsion about speaking French pleased her no end. It was really a shame that 'Toinette had to leave, since Mama would then have no further excuse for making such agreeable noises through her nose. (At the moment, Mama was certainly engrossed in making them.)

"Myself," the Empress stated modestly and with

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the air of one who has never divulged this secret until now, "myself, I gave birth to sixteen little ones——"

She fell silent, perhaps at the vexing realization that they had not all been sons. Quite possibly she blushed under the cover of darkness. Eleven daughters! Only death had stepped in and with ruthless blows adjusted the ratio. Not that Maria Theresia had failed to grieve at loss of each baby girl; but if in their stead her five boys had been struck down the Empress would have gone insane. Did she not still bemoan the little Archduke Karl far more than all the others who lay beside him in their narrow crypts? She had been paralyzed with shock that Karl, her second son, should have been marked by Fate. For days—and how many nights?—she had stayed on her knees, impressing upon God that here was an error, for surely God must have had someone else in mind. . . .

And God had understood. He did not repeat the mistake. She had been left rejoicing in four sons, strapping, handsome lads, all of them.

At thought of her sons, the Empress' mind veered abruptly to Joseph. She did hope he could be depended upon in the matter of escorting 'Toinette as

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far as Kloster Melk—and no further. There was something about Joseph; either he loved travel to excess or else he was bent on getting away from his mother's apron strings. Maria Theresia could not tell which, though she had her suspicions. Last year, during the fleet maneuvers at Trieste, he had all but chartered a yawl and started on a trip around the world; an alarmed admiral had caught the young man's coat tails just in time (and thereby earned for himself the Cross of Saint Stephen).

Yes, Joseph's wanderlust bore watching. His globe-trotting proclivities smacked too much of a well-planned campaign to win new proselytes to the Joseph cult. Like some journeyman merchant who carried his wares far and wide, the genial Hapsburg saw himself as the empire's trader and traveling trumpeter, all in one. He claimed to be promoting Austrian interests abroad. But Maria Theresia was never hoodwinked by anybody, least of all her offspring. She knew that Joseph loved the limelight and that if he ever promoted anything it could only be in the interest of Joseph.

Perhaps it was unwise to send him off with 'Toinette's bridal party. He might comport himself in

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such a way that all attention became centered on his person, quite as if he—and not the girl—were en route to wed the Dauphin. Joseph had a way of winnowing favor which on any stage was calculated to steal the show. The devil of it was that even Maria Theresa fell sometimes under his spell. She suffered untold mortification at his antics, only to be captured by the plausibility of his personal propaganda. It was excellent propaganda. It worked like nothing else in the world, and on occasion it captivated Joseph himself. In short, when she regarded her first-born, Maria Theresa was helplessly at sea. For he was a thoroughly remarkable fellow and he often told her so.

Of course there would be other members of 'Toinette's retinue whom one could trust. Count Georg Starhemberg, former Ambassador to France and now First Chamberlain, would keep a hawk's eye on the imperial progress from the gates of Vienna to the very banks of the Rhine. Beside him would ride his sister, the Countess Judith von Brandeiss, who for many years had served as 'Toinette's governess. It was from Countess Judith that one acquired such accomplishments as penmanship, drawing, embroidery, clo-

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cution and table manners. Also, since the governess was very tidy, 'Toinette learned by example to be fastidious and orderly at an early age. It had been a splendid idea, Maria Theresia reflected, to include Countess Judith in the traveling suite. All along the tiresome journey teacher and pupil could engage in one final rehearsal of the bride's proficiencies and, if necessary, mend a few gaps. With the aid of Abbé Vermond there would be vocabulary drill (alternating French and Italian) practically every inch of the way.

Gerhard van Swieten, the Empress' favorite physician, had been entrusted with 'Toinette's physical well-being. But the aged Dutchman begged to be excused from so strenuous an undertaking. He sent his fellow-countryman and assistant, the chemist Jean Ingenhouse, to serve in his stead. In addition there would be Frau Weber, who had held the post of ayah to the imperial children. During 'Toinette's babyhood Frau Weber had been the best wet nurse in Vienna, but as such she was no longer in demand. Past middle-age and very dry, the former ayah now looked after the linens. It was she who must see to it that Maria Theresia's daughter did not enter France

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with wrinkled undergarments or her petticoat awry (the Empress being unaware as yet that young 'Toinette would enter France without any garments at all). Maria Theresia liked Frau Weber especially and considered her a most versatile person; all would go well with the trip if this paragon of female virtues went along. What was more, at Schönbrunn one would know every detail of what occurred en route, for the old nursemaid kept a diary which was somewhat difficult to decipher but which made excellent reading withal.

The Empress could obviously rest content. Her most tried and trusted servitors had been enlisted in the present venture. Each functioned like a well-trained puppet (and was she not herself the best of puppeteers?). Even at a distance the anxious mother would know just what everyone was doing—everyone, that is, but Joseph. And even Joseph's actions would be circumscribed by the above-listed imperial minions.

Having reached this point in her meditations, the Empress yawned. She rolled back comfortably among the bedclothes and drifted off into half-slumber when a sudden recollection brought her up with

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a jolt. The "talk"—what had become of the "talk" she meant to have with 'Toinette on this final parting night? Why, the child had still not the faintest idea of marriage and men. . . .

Maria Theresia took a deep breath to fortify herself against that which she knew she could not do. She cleared her throat, rose to a sitting position and wedged one pudgy elbow against her pillow for a prop. Well, it was now or never. She must speak and bring the Demon Sex to heel.

In her narrow bed across the room 'Toinette lay silent. Not even the sound of her breathing could be heard. Was she asleep? This possibility gave the Empress courage. The very idea! When there were important things to be discussed the simple child dozed off. . . . Maria Theresia began to bridle and to see herself as a brave mother bent upon performing a sacred duty. She whipped herself into the perfect mood for calling a spade by its name. At last 'Toinette would hear the facts concerning a man (the Dauphin, to be exact) and a woman, for tonight the Empress would seize the Demon Sex by both horns.

Across the room a little moan was heard, as the

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girl tossed in her sleep and thrust her arm against the night table. The pain awakened her.

Startled, the Empress suffered a chill. When she recovered, her bravado had wilted and she knew a spade would not be called by its name after all. Quite feebly, with only a glimmer of conviction, Her Majesty took up her closing tilt with the Demon Sex.

“'Toinette—”

“Yes, Mama?”

“Remember, my child, that you are to be a queen.”

'Toinette seemed bored by this admonition which she had heard before and which struck her as hardly worth repeating.

“Oh yes, Mama,” she murmured sleepily, her voice trailing off into a whisper, “I do remember—”

“Well,” resumed the Empress vaguely, “all I wanted to say is—”

The words seemed to choke her. She lapsed again into French, trusting its elegance to see her through. With a fine disregard for technicalities she wound up her discourse:

“A queen ought to become *enceinte* as quickly as possible.”

There—she had got it off her chest—though, heaven

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help her, it didn't seem to make much sense. Nor, for that matter, was it leaving much of an impression. Furtively Maria Theresia paused to listen for a response that was not forthcoming. Had the foolish girl not heard? 'Toinette, 'Toinette! A queen must have children. . . .

Across the room a brief sigh broke the stillness. Then there was a playful whisper, soft as if in a dream. The Empress perched on the edge of her mattress, almost tumbling out of the sheets in her effort to listen, yet even so she could not be certain that she had heard right. For the stray words that reached her puzzled ears had something to do with a "*petit chien Mops.*"



Matters at Versailles



THE PALACE of Versailles is a monument to kingship.

Built by the *Roi Soleil*, Louis XIV, it surpasses all royal edifices of the world in both boldness of conception and splendor of execution. It has been coveted and copied many times, but equalled never. For it remains the highest and most fatal gesture of autocracy mankind has known.

King Louis XIV himself stands immortalized not so much by the glorious rapacity that characterized his reign as by a small deft phrase he coined: "*L'état, c'est moi.*" Neither the particular date on which he snatched the Spanish Netherlands, Flanders and the

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French Comté, nor his siege of Strassburg-in-Alsace could epitomize the true worth of this great Bourbon; a date is readily forgotten or superseded by another even more unimportant. But the dictum "I am the State" remains, crystallizing for all time the ultimate essence of sovereignty. By this audacious formula the Sun-King proclaimed himself the pulse of France, the hub of the world, the navel of the universe.

His gay descendant, Louis XV, also had a way with words. He tossed them cheerfully together until they formed a shibboleth too trenchant for oblivion: "*Après nous le déluge.*" And by that phrase a generation lived. For to the royal faun of the Trianon it mattered little what the political complexion of his realm might one day be, provided that complexion remained comely enough while his lascivious eyes must gaze upon it. During his bacchanalian reign France lost her finest overseas possessions in the East and West Indies as well as Canada. But what of that? The deluge would not come until the Casanova King had drained the fountains of his lust with Pompadour, Dubarry and the seventy-odd virgins of the *Parc aux Cerfs*. Decidedly, Louis XV lacked his forebear's appreciation and delusion of grandeur. With sub-

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lime indifference he declined to be pulse, hub or navel of anything beyond the province of his own boudoir. And in any case he would have employed a different metaphor.

The kindest of biographers would not paint Louis XV as a commendable paterfamilias. Like Maria Theresia he could boast his quota of legitimate offspring (in other fields she offered him no competition) but fatherhood was the least of his preoccupations. Of the ten children Marie Leszczinska bore him only four survived. Since they were girls, the King despised them.

He did not think them important enough to merit titles. Thus, in lieu of "Royal Highness" or "Princess," each was addressed at court merely as "Madame." Often as not they were referred to in numbers: One, Two, Three, Four. But when their father was in good spirits he favored each with a nickname—the eldest, Madame Adelaide, being called *Loque* (Rags)—Madame Victoire, the second, answering to *Coche* (Sow)—Madame Sophie, who was chubby and didn't mind, would be named *Graillon* (Greasy Cracklings)—while Madame Louise, the last, was known as *Chiffe* (Cheap Silk).

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The four ladies, dour and repressed, had long ago lost every vestige of bloom. They had lacked beauty from the start, being equipped with sharp Bourbon noses, receding foreheads and a hatchet jaw-line. But it was the fact that Louis XV had set aside no dowry for his daughters which doomed them to spinsterhood. They lived on in the Palace, occupied chiefly with prayers, gossip and the upbringing of their nephews, the three sons of the late Dauphin.

These boys interested Louis XV even less than did Rags, Sow, Cracklings and Poor Silk. The eldest of them, known as the Duc de Berry, ranked as Dauphin since his father's death, yet no one seemed to be aware of it. Least of all the boy himself. He was a dull, lethargic lout of slight mentality and no wit. Clumsy and burdened with the combined ungainliness of his four aunts, he shambled across the parquetry of Versailles like some bewildered peasant clod. At sight of his rouged and powdered grandfather he skulked behind screens or draperies, lest the King see fit to make him the butt of some cruel joke.

Younger than the Dauphin, though quite as bulky and heavy-footed as he, was the Comte Stanislas Xavier de Provence, second grandson to the King.

But Provence had a nimble brain which asserted itself even in nursery days. Quite early in life the eldest brother's stolidity had fed ambitious fires in the younger boy's breast, so that a constant feud broiled between them. The Dauphin knew, in his torpid way, that here was a rival ready to supplant him. On occasion, when fawning sycophants heaped flattery upon his person, he was heard to reply with rather more than usual perspicacity:

"Ah no, Monsieur, it is not I who can be called clever; it is my brother Provence!"

With this the Comte de Provence thoroughly agreed. He felt that if enough people came to share the same opinion something would be done about it. The only fly in the ointment was the youngest brother, known as the Comte Charles Philippe d'Artois.

The Comte d'Artois resembled Provence in mental agility, but he had a physique to match his brain. Slender, restless and consumed with boundless energy, the third grandson believed himself truly the King's heir. Even during childish games d'Artois was forever bent upon outwitting his brothers and showing up their weakest points. He thrashed them both and

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trussed them up with clotheslines from the royal laundry, snarling the while: "*Faites salut au roi!*" Whereat they wriggled a free finger to salute him.

But in the spring of 1770 this situation changed. The Dauphin, heretofore a negligible quantity at court, was suddenly brought into prominence by the impending marriage to an archduchess of Austria. True, everyone had known of his betrothal years ago, but in this enlightened day and age people did not take a mere engagement seriously. Innumerable catastrophes could happen before a wedding knot was tied. The prospective bride might fall in love and run away with somebody else. The Dauphin might trip and break his neck. Or his brothers might break it for him. In short, one could never tell.

With Empress Maria Theresia pinning the matter down to an actual date, however, all this uncertainty was ended. France buzzed with thrills and excitement at the coming event. The Aunts (as the King's daughters were collectively referred to) suffered belated heart throbs in anticipation of the royal romance. Versailles itself began to preen and unfold its treasures for a lavish gala celebration.

Louis XV entered into the proceedings with good

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cheer. He detested weddings on the whole, but there were times when something could be gained by orthodoxy, so he favored orthodoxy. Let his grandson take that little Austrian for a wife; as long as this would irritate the Prussian Fritz, one could not but applaud it. Besides, peace with Maria Theresia was worth a marriage any time.

If Louis XV remained cheerful, Madame Dubarry did not. In the full flush of her power, the royal favorite up to now had never felt fear of a rival. Nor could she admit the slightest compunction in regard to a Hapsburg damsel of fourteen. Had not the King roared at each portrait of the Viennese maid? No, even though the rakish Louis plucked many a budding flower, this green dynastic peach would scarcely tempt him. Thus it was not the woman in 'Toinette who gave Madame Dubarry pause. It was her rank as future Dauphiness of France.

Countess Dubarry had not always been a countess. Born at Vaucouleurs in 1743 to an unmarried peasant wench named Anne Bécu, she had started life as a simple Marie Jeanne. (There was also a brother named Claude.) In the course of time the little

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family had moved to Paris where Anne Bécu won herself a husband, Pierre Rançon, who held a good job as domestic in the home of a rich financier and philanthropist, Monsieur Billaud-Dumonceaux. Affairs looked very much brighter from then on.

For one thing, the philanthropist liked little girls. He had a friend, the Abbé Arnaud, who liked them too. (Nobody seemed to care for Claude.) The two amiable patrons made Marie Jeanne's development their particular concern; they placed her in the convent school of Sainte-Aurore where Dumonceaux paid the bills while the Abbé heard confession.

After seven years of schooling, the girl emerged at fifteen to find her benefactor furthering the progress of a younger protégée. Life in the maternal garret proved uncongenial, so there was nothing for it but to start out on her own. Marie Jeanne became coiffeuse and lady's maid to a Madame de la Garde who entertained a host of masculine friends. Everything went well until Madame de la Garde's friends began calling at the back door; this cost Marie Jeanne her job.

She changed her name to Mademoiselle Lange, thereafter, and went in search of a new place. When

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work did not turn up promptly she called herself Jeanne Beauvernier which sounded more aristocratic. Under this cognomen she was finally employed by the millinery shop of Monsieur Labille.

A new world opened to her now. As midinette she walked the streets of Paris carrying hats and bonnets to the trade. Her flowered and beribboned boxes won entrée to elegant homes where ladies tried on the latest models before mirrors while their husbands ogled the shapely Jeanne. She had many lovers who in turn bought many hats for their wives. The Labille shop prospered.

One of her admirers, the Comte Jean Dubarry, soon took up so much of her time that she got very little stitching done and, worse still, she fell behind on her deliveries. Monsieur Labille tried to eclipse his adversary by redoubling his own courtship of Jeanne. But this only crowded her the more, while the business continued to suffer. In the end Monsieur Labille grew frantic; he had to make a choice between his passion and his hats. The midinette was fired.

She went directly to her noble paramour, who owned a fashionable gambling house not far from the Trianon. Here she was installed as hostess. The

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name of Beauvernier was re-written Vaubernier and, to make it more impressive, it received the prefix of Gomard. Four years went by during which Jeanne Gomard-Vaubernier presided over the gaming tables and fancied that Dubarry would marry her. But, as he demurely explained, his wife would not let him.

It was in 1768 that Louis XV flipped a coin one day and went out for a round of baccarat. His veteran mistress, Madame Pompadour, had been dead for some time and the saddened King needed diversion. He found it in the salons of the Comte Dubarry. With Louis, finding was keeping; he wished to take Jeanne home with him at once.

The statesman Choiseul interfered by pointing out to his royal master that a simple Mademoiselle so-and-so could not be received at court.

"*Parbleu*, that can be remedied," said the King, "Comte Dubarry must marry her!"

But Dubarry shrugged apologetic shoulders. "My wife won't let me," was his guileless answer.

This left His Majesty in a quandary until someone remembered that Jean Dubarry had a bachelor brother named Guillaume. Guillaume lived on the family dung-heap in Cascabelle and he cared about

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nothing but drink. He would be ideally qualified for the rôle of an absentee husband.

Delightedly the King wrote out an order and messengers went forth to fetch the sodden Guillaume. Two days later the marriage was performed and Mademoiselle Jeanne entered Versailles as the Comtesse Dubarry. Presented formally at court, she garnered the enforced homage of aristocrats and royal relatives alike. Her permanent address became the chambers of the King.

She had risen in life. Yet, despite her triumphs, La Dubarry did not have an easy time of it. The courtiers who scraped and bowed before her nevertheless refused to accept the outsider as one of their own. Only rarely was she accorded her rightful title of Countess; they spoke of her as Madame—just as they had done with that other parvenue, Jeanne Antoinette Poisson, alias Marquise de Pompadour.

Apart from these social snubs there was the problem of the Aunts. From the start La Dubarry had found herself embroiled in a bitter feud with Rags, Sow, Cracklings and Tattered Silk. The King's daughters were frankly up in arms against the Jezebel. To the four spinsters, long ago congealed betwixt

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their vestal sheets, it was a matter of extreme mortification to view their father's latest antidote against lonely nights. They gathered in a huddled conclave and gave vent to outraged sensibilities as best they could, which, considering their lack of adequate vocabulary, brought little satisfaction. Next, they planned a definite line of attack whereby the intruder was to be beaten off.

Perhaps the war upon Madame Dubarry could be best waged through the Dauphin and his brothers. In their three nephews the Aunts expected to find a powerful weapon, since the boys were still of an impressionable age. It seemed an easy task to browbeat the King's grandsons, poisoning their minds with shocking revelations of adult misconduct.

Mesdames One, Two, Three and Four did their best in this respect, but their best was hardly hair-raising. At least, the two younger princes absorbed it all with unabashed delight and asked for more, while the Dauphin would have remained placidly indifferent even to tales of incest. He was that imperturbable, the Dauphin. One had to stand him on his head before he took notice. As for the results of this opening campaign, nothing could have been

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more disheartening. Instead of stirring up smouldering hate, the Aunts had merely succeeded in making the Dubarry's position more secure. The Dauphin hated nobody, least of all the jeweled, perfumed favorite who left him cold. His brothers, on the other hand, were dazzled by her sinful allure. Far from jeering the royal trollop, they skulked about her rooms in hope of spying some fleet and unchaste vision which had been conjured up in their adolescent minds by the rank whispering of the spinsters. At thirteen and twelve, Province and d'Artois were ready for enlightenment. The Aunts had pointed the way.

Needless to say, this only amused the royal mistress, who would have had little trouble winning the youthful admirers into her camp and pitting them against her enemies. But the Dubarry had no intention of jeopardizing her economic future by offending the King. She did not yield to profitless temptation.

In addition, and this amazed her as much as it would amaze history, she had already begun to feel that dog-like, almost genuine devotion to her senile lover which would one day seal her doom. (The hour was coming when all turned from him and

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Madame Dubarry alone nursed the royal carcass, pestilent with smallpox. And after that the morning was not far away when for this loyalty she, who was peasant to the core, died on the guillotine like an aristocrat.) No, La Dubarry never made the slightest effort to come between the King and his blood kin. Despite her love of ostentation and pomp there was in her a strange personal humility. At heart she had remained Jeanne Bécu, child of chance.

The Aunts would not bury the hatchet. Having failed in their initial attack they concentrated on a different scheme. If the King's grandsons could not be counted on, a Hapsburg archduchess could. They would bide their time and wait for Marie Antoinette.

Biding their time was painful in the extreme. It meant the endurance of innumerable indignities such as curtsying before the Jezebel who ranked now officially as *Grande Maîtresse en Titre*. Every time Rags and Sow bent their thin shanks to curtsy, a bilious seizure was sure to follow; with parchment-colored cheeks more jaundiced than ever, the two ladies retired for days to their sanctum, only to

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emerge again without the slightest relief from rancor and pique.

Cracklings had a far less vexing time. She was plump and jovial, never sullen. What was more, her limbs possessed the bouncing elasticity of a jack-in-the-box, so that she did not mind court calisthenics. The fact that the Dubarry took precedence over the King's own daughters at banquets or other functions was naturally galling, but Cracklings was able to take her grievances in better grace than the other sisters. With a disdainful snort she bowed before the favorite, then trundled serenely on to inspect the royal menu. No bilious attack for her. It took more than a trull to upset a lady's stomach.

It was *Chiffe*, the last of the Aunts, who really suffered most. Poor Silk! She had indeed been properly named. Homely and drab, she was a hunchback to boot. For *Chiffe* the daily obeisance to La Dubarry became sheer torture. Quite apart from the onus borne by her pride, there were aching bones as constant reminders of misery yet to come. The King was not likely to tire of the enchantress; there would be years of scraping and genuflecting at her skirts. *Chiffe* did not see how she could stand it. Point-

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blank she resolved to leave the world and enter a convent.

Louis XV had no objection. He thought she should have done so long ago. He asked his remaining daughters if they also wished to enter convents. But they did not. They had become used to the excitement of sustained strife and the pricking anticipation of still further hostilities. Like old war-horses in the thick of battle, they loved the sniff of combat. The monastic life with its quiescent calm would have cheated them of the only dramatic throb they knew—the brightly burning blaze of hate. Besides, no passion was more gratifying than moral indignation. It warmed the blood and sped the heart action to a delicious twitter. The three senior sisters felt positively rejuvenated by it; they had no thought of quitting. Let the white-livered *Chiffe* take the veil and go her way. *Loque*, *Coche* and *Graillon* would man the fort and keep up a good fray.

Of course they did not know exactly what tactics they would employ toward Marie Antoinette. Perhaps the Archduchess was a sophisticated worldly minx who could not be shocked into disapproval by the most scandalous tale. Those Viennese had a repu-

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tation for frivolity. On the other hand, the frolicsome Austrian court was at the moment ruled by a matriarch, the prudent and prudish Empress Maria Theresia. The more flagrant Hapsburg cavortings had undoubtedly been toned down. One could hope that Maria Theresia's daughter left nothing to be desired, either in piety or virtue.

Assuming, then, that young 'Toinette would be clad in an odor of sanctity, the Aunts planned to take her in hand from the start. Graphically, since at her tender age she might not understand, they would inform her of the King's lewd conduct. With the finger of scorn they would point out and brand the royal courtesan. ('Toinette had probably never heard of a courtesan and she would require a definition.) In short, there must be no lack of preparation on the part of the Aunts; whatever questions an innocent girl might ask, the Aunts must know all the answers. Well, they knew plenty and they were not skittish about retailing what they knew. On occasion, as in their dealings with the Dauphin and his brothers, the spinsters could be very technical.

They naturally counted on the aid of the Abbé Vermond, 'Toinette's father-confessor. Rags, Sow

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and Cracklings remembered him quite well, for he had been their favorite chaplain prior to his appointment in Vienna. The sisters could not suppress a certain excitement at the prospect of seeing him again. Had he forgotten them? At times he seemed to have shown a predilection for Cracklings, who claimed that he once pinched her double chin. But there were other and far more subtle signs by which Sow and Rags each felt herself singled out, while their dimpled sister (she was conceited, was Cracklings) had obviously been mistaken. Thus the three ladies prized the good Abbé, each in her fashion. And it all accrued to their combined celestial account, since mystic ardor never fails to increase piety.

Vermond's particular usefulness in the Dubarry situation was of course apparent. Entrusted with the ethical welfare of the Archduchess, the cleric would look askance on all iniquity. He, too, would point a finger of scorn, curl the lip, raise indignant eyebrows (quite as the Aunts were doing) at the profligacy of Versailles. And the fourteen-year-old Marie Antoinette must take her cue from him. The spectacle of sin called for a frown and a wrinkling up of the pert Hapsburg nose.

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Yet, would this be enough? After all, just when 'Toinette or the Abbé and the Aunts glowered most fiercely, La Dubarry might not be looking. An unobserved reproof was a wasted reproof. The sisters all agreed that stringent measures must be employed if their campaign was to have any effect.

Up to the time of Marie Antoinette's arrival the Dubarry held undisputed sway as first lady of the court. In the absence of a queen, the King's mistress discharged all the functions of a royal consort. She held levées, presided over charity balls or banquets, received foreign diplomats, arranged audiences for His Majesty and recommended ambitious politicians to coveted posts in the ministry. Madame Dubarry performed these tasks with such tact and skill that there was at court no man or woman to challenge her. She leaned securely upon a large following of carpet knights who in turn lived off her bounty.

But with the appearance of a Dauphiness the scene must change. Legitimacy would triumph once the Heir Apparent to the Crown married and brought his bride into the palace. The royal mistress might continue at court, but she would cease to be its first lady.

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In fact, unless the Dauphiness accorded her official recognition, she would cease to be a lady at all.

Here was the crux of the situation upon which the Aunts must concentrate their efforts. The little princess from the Hofburg would need expert coaching in the art of snubbing an adversary. If she succeeded in jerking the favorite from her lofty perch, Marie Antoinette would earn the angry wrath of Louis XV and the undying devotion of his spinster daughters. Or vice versa. It was a matter of choice, with the odds against her from the start.

There was one person at Versailles who did not care one whit about all this. He was the Dauphin.

Even though he had been singled out as one of the principals in the impending drama, the Duc de Berry seemed completely indifferent to the preparations that went on around him. Five years ago he had learned that some day he must marry a little Austrian maid whose portraits arrived at intervals through the royal mails. Scarcely eleven years old at that time, he had not been interested in the prospect. And, frankly, he was not interested now. The idea of a stranger coming to share his bed and board, when he had not

even asked her to do so, was heartily distasteful to him.

"I fear," wrote Ambassador Mercy-Argenteau to the Empress Maria Theresia, "that the Dauphin is not like other young men. . . ."

In fearing which, His Excellency was right. For, the hulking grandson of Louis XV seemed to be growing into an enigma. He was neither gay nor sad, but given to a profound lethargy which no form of excitement could dispel. Despite his size and extraordinary weight, he lacked masculine vigor and assertiveness. At sixteen, while his younger brothers peered through keyholes into royal boudoirs, the Dauphin knew no promptings of curiosity or lust.

"He is as sexless," quoth the King, "as a pancake."

To Louis XV such a grandson was humiliating. Decidedly, Berry would never shock the world with political exploits or gallant adventures; he would not even coin a phrase, as his forebears had done. If Berry were the State, woe to the name of Bourbon!

Of course, Berry might conceivably be that very Deluge which Louis the Libertine hailed after himself. Following the intellectual grandeur of the *Roi Soleil* and the carnal excesses of the Trianon monarch, the

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Dauphin epitomized the exhaustion of his race. Both mentally and physically he had nothing to give. His ancestors had spent it all before him. Like no other character in history he embodied weariness. His was a perpetual tired feeling, the fatigue of a dynasty that had outlived its day.

This state of low vitality was not laziness any more than the Dauphin's stupor could be called stupidity. By nature, Berry seemed to be kind, gentle and just. He possessed qualifications highly prized in a future ruler. But he remained placidly indifferent to those qualifications and to the job of kingship that lay ahead. He simply didn't care; that was all.

They measured him one day for his wedding suit, making exact notations in regard to frock coat, lace vestee and breeches. Asked for a choice of color, he brooded earnestly without result. He had no preferences about anything, least of all about color. Just let them see to it that the pants were large enough, for he sat around a great deal and—like his Aunt Cracklings—he was broad of beam.

Motherless since early youth, he did not remember ever having been kissed. At all events, it was a performance which (from much observation of his

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grandfather's court) he abhorred. If marriage involved anything of that sort he would certainly not be a party to it. In the dark recesses of his heart he vowed that the alien bride who was being foisted upon him should keep her distance . . . (Actually this vow was enforced for seven years of wedlock with 'Toinette, until surgical interference changed the Dauphin's mind.). . .

Meanwhile the royal plans must go forward without heed for the inhibitions of an erratic bridegroom. News had been received from Vienna that the imperial caravan was on its way. Three detachments of the great cavalcade were reported moving up the Danube toward the Bavarian border. This meant that within a fortnight the travelers could be expected to enter France.

King Louis XV was all agog. Now that the historic event was imminent he got into the spirit of things. Far more spry than his grandson, the monarch began to speculate as to the appearance and other merits of the little Hapsburg maid. Was she a dainty tidbit like the adolescents reserved for him in the *Parc aux Cerfs*? Dubarry's forerunner, La Pompadour, had stocked this rustic bower with untouched blooms

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in order to revive the senile King's jaded appetite. The remedy had worked. His Majesty's appetite was far from jaded now.

With a curiosity that bordered on impatience, Louis XV made a few plans of his own. Why wait at Versailles for the bridal caravan to arrive? It would be far more amusing to meet the travelers somewhere along the way. (His Majesty loved picnics.) As a result the royal household climbed into gilt carriages packed with week-end provisions and set out for the forest of Compiègne. Here, under the leafy canopy spangled with May sunshine, a regal encampment was set up. Tents were spread from one barouche to the next and a conglomeration of regal furnishings soon filled the clearing. Courtiers, ladies-in-waiting, bodyguards and lackeys all moved about in satin and lace, fitting themselves into a Corot shepherd scene. In the distance, hidden behind thicket brambles, the King's fifers, trumpeters and drummers rehearsed their scores so that the royal company might not be bored.

Under a special baldachin La Dubarry sat, preening herself for the encounter with a Hapsburg rival. The favorite must look her very best to make a proper im-

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pression. Already she wore her hair *à la Dauphine*, pinned straight up from the brow, the way those Austrians did. And she carried a muslin square such as the young 'Toinette reportedly had wept into. La Dubarry felt very genteel waving this bit of cloth about; nervous and unsure of herself, she frequently dabbed at the black *mouche* or beauty patch on her face, which caused bystanders to remark that the odd square of muslin must be a *mouchoir*. Before long, several ladies of the royal entourage sported small lace-trimmed kerchiefs with which they dabbed to their hearts' content. Even the King demanded one and into it, with no little pride and ostentation, he blew the royal nose.

Thus happy days were spent in bucolic abandon while waiting for a puff of dust on the horizon which would herald the approaching bride. Card games and conversation filled the hours that were not given over to drinking, dining and dancing. Altogether a delightful time was had by everyone; everyone, that is, except the Aunts and the Dauphin.

The Aunts suffered from rheumatism, which greatly dimmed their enthusiasm for woodland frolics. Besides this, they had been quartered in a

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creaking chariot of ancient vintage which stood anchored just behind the elegant Dubarry coach. At all hours of the day and night their sharp ears caught the dove-like cooing of the Jezebel as she wheedled and coaxed her wicked lover for ever new favors. Already she dripped with jewels wherewith to blind and dazzle the fashion world, yet the Dubarry's lust for diamonds seemed unquenchable. Peering through cracks and peep-holes, the royal spinsters observed their father's mistress as she piled precious stones and baubles about her sinful throat. The sight of that snow-white, voluptuous expanse of bosom caused their hearts to shrivel with loathing, yet they could not refrain from eavesdropping or spying upon all that went on in the neighboring coach.

The Dauphin showed no interest in either the self-torture of the Aunts or the exhibitionism of the Dubarry. His inert frame, five feet ten inches tall, was seen lolling about the commissary cart where the merry clatter of dishes held the attention of the younger folk. Occasionally Berry vanished into some solitary corner where he made laborious jottings on bits of paper, for he kept a diary. It was a prosy and detailed record of commonplace happenings such

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as the number of times he had been forced to belch on a certain day, or the loss of a buckle on his shoe. The present sojourn at Compiègne was noted in a few brief phrases to the effect that one waited here for the first "*Entrevue avec Madame la Dauphine*." (Aware that he was already wedded to 'Toinette by proxy, he referred to her in the most matter-of-fact manner as the Dauphiness.)

No storm or stress seemed able to change the tenor of this remarkable diary. Years later, when Berry was King Louis XVI, he would continue his artless scribblings. Every page was a masterpiece of objectivity, disclosing that on Whitsunday His Majesty had shot a stag and thereafter been late for church. Or again, the royal account took on a medico-biographical hue. "My hair is falling out," wrote Berry sadly. And another time: "Today I purged myself." Quite possibly he thus produced the only document in history which faithfully reveals dynastic procedure on the subject of cathartics, baldness and the incompatibility of sports and devotions of a Sunday morn.

While Berry penned his jottings and the French court waited, busy with rustic play beneath the shade trees, in faraway Bavaria an imperial cavalcade

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moved westward at a gallop. Now Swabia was in view and soon the Rhineland would re-echo the rumble of a thousand wheels.

At Strassburg a young poet, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, lingered on holiday and paused to inspect the decorations. He viewed the new pavilion on the island in the Rhine where Marie Antoinette would ex-



change her Austrian lingerie for that of France. He thought he might stay on and await the glorious pageant, when something changed his mind. It was a glimpse of the interior of the pavilion, hung with damasks and tapestries of priceless worth. One of the tapestries, the most impressive and elaborate of all, represented the tale of Jason and Medea—that saga of blood and retribution which is symbolic of unhappiness in marriage.

The tapestry had been hung by some well-meaning

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and ignorant decorator who hoped to brighten up an otherwise bleak and unadorned wall. It was doubtful whether anyone in the vast bridal cortège would even notice it. But for Goethe it seemed enough.

He went away, unwilling to see more.

Irregularity



THE PICTURESQUE
Baroque monastery of
Melk surmounted the hills that overlooked the
Danube. It boasted a magnificent chapel, a library of
renown, a choir famous for Gregorian chaunts, and
a portly prior who knew his wines. Though scarcely
fifty miles removed from Vienna, the cellars of Melk
rivalled those in the most distant foreign lands. When
stocking the imperial pantry, Hapsburg majordomos
paid as high a price for the native grape tended by
Austrian friars as they did for the costliest Rhenish
vintages or the best Burgundy from France.

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Emperor Joseph knew this. He was very gratified that Melk had been selected as a terminus for his brief journey as escort to 'Toinette. While the bridal caravan moved on from there, His Majesty reflected, it would be most appropriate to linger a few days in the benign company of the holy brothers and to inspect their liquid treasures.

But first the bridal caravan must move on, a difficult matter in view of the roads which were sodden with torrential rains. Ever since 'Toinette's departure from Vienna the heavens had wept. All along the Danube shore great bursts of thunder, punctuated by sharp lightning, had accompanied the rumble of the carriage wheels. Both luggage vans and passenger shays had sunk in the mud up to their hubs and iron springs. Throughout the journey silk-clad gentlemen and lace-covered ladies had dodged the spattering mire that swirled up from horses' hoofs or oozed through every cranny in the carriage floors. Riders pulled up their knees while the womenfolk curled up slippered toes under the taffeta folds of their huge skirts. On arrival at Melk a general ablution had taken place in the monastic laundry, while in the courtyard below great buckets of fresh water were

emptied over vehicles and beasts until the entire train had been rinsed.

A day and a night had passed since then. The sun shone brightly in the sky and it was high time for the journeying to be resumed. But Melk was a fantastic place, full of medieval charm. It had a lovely vineyard, a vault filled with green bottles, a lute-playing prior, and an oubliette where Suleyman the Magnificent was said to have drowned one of his slaves. In addition to these amenities, the good friars spread an appetizing table. In short, the Hapsburg-Bourbon alliance notwithstanding, nobody wanted to leave.

It was Emperor Joseph himself who finally brought up the question. Mellow with good cheer and even better wine, he summoned Starhemberg, Vermond and the remaining members of 'Toinette's personal suite. He frowned at them impressively, then rose to his splendid height and roared:

"On with the journey, gentlemen! My sister needs a husband. . . ."

Despite his solemn mien they seemed in no hurry to obey. Had he not struck the proper majestic note?

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"The roads haven't begun to dry," ventured Starhemberg while the Abbé, sampling a drop from a near-by beaker, implied that parched throats could do with further dampening.

Obviously Maria Theresia's most trusted minions, on whose shoulders rested the responsibility for a successful pilgrimage to France, were about to fail her. They hardly cared whether the pilgrimage was successful or not.

Emperor Joseph drew a quick conclusion. Since the trusted minions were not to be trusted, the caravan could hardly move on alone, unless—happy thought—Joseph went with it. At least part of the way, to make certain that 'Toinette reached her destination. This would conflict with Maria Theresia's specific ruling that her son was not to travel beyond Melk. But Joseph could see, as matters stood now, that it was practically his duty to proceed with the trip. And he was never one to shirk a pleasant duty when he saw it.

With elaborate show of irritation, so that no one might suspect his vast delight, the Emperor made ready to depart.

"I ought to go home," he told Starhemberg, "but

Irregularity

these unexpected hardships are a challenge I cannot eschew."

In Count Starhemberg's slightly befogged brain a dim warning began to sound. He recalled the Empress and some admonition regarding her son's incurable wanderlust which he, Starhemberg, had promised to curb. The Abbé Vermond experienced a similar pang of conscience. Both men favored the eschewing of all challenges.

"No, no," they cried in unison, "Your Majesty must not—"

But Joseph interrupted them with a flourish.

"I shall go with you," he said gallantly. "*Basta!*"

That settled it, of course. Pack-mules and luggage vans were piled high with imperial chattels while freshly scrubbed palfreys, glistening in their polished harness, frisked out of the monastery stables. 'Toinette's painted coach, drawn by sixteen alabaster-white Lipizza steeds, rumbled through the great archway that led to Saint Godofreda's Gate and the Passau Road. By noon of April 24th the cavalcade was merrily on its way.

Since provision must be made for each successive

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night, heralds sped ahead with news of the imperial progress. And it was thus that at Sibyllengard, a tiny hamlet in Southern Württemberg, history staged a most engaging pantomime. . . .



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DUKE KARL EBERHARD of Württemberg was a hospitable soul who loved nothing so much as an excuse to hold a feast. He celebrated everything from a fine harvest to a bad hailstorm, the winter solstice, or a village girl's untoward visitation by the Holy Ghost. For Duke Karl firmly believed in making all of life into a jubilee. He was possessed to an uncommon degree of the dramatic touch.

On a dewy spring morning in 1770 opportunity presented itself for the sudden exercise of that touch. In the midst of Duchess Frederica's annual palace-

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cleaning an extraordinary report arrived from Stuttgart. Messengers pausing for drink at Duke Karl's favorite ale-house spread the tidings that Emperor Joseph II of Austria was even now on his way to Paris accompanied by his youngest sister, Archduchess Antonia, who would espouse the Dauphin of France. The travelers had passed through Munich and were moving by slow stages over the Bavarian Alps. They would reach Swabia by the end of the week.

"My dear," said Duke Karl to his wife, "shall we put them up?"

The Duchess, always amiable, thought they should.

Thus, while the imperial van-couriers hastened westward toward the Rhine, the lord of Sibyllengard dispatched one of his servants eastward to Bavaria with instructions to intercept the Hapsburg caravan and to offer Emperor Joseph the ducal *Schloss*. The *Schloss* contained, so ran the invitation, "twenty-four bedrooms, each equipped with porcelain stove against the chills of an inclement season; a dining hall seating two hundred guests; a music salon with parquetry adapted to the minuet; a spinning-room, an

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aviary, a cellar and a splendid mews. . . ." In view of such attractions it was to be expected that His Majesty would not refuse.

"He *can't* refuse," Duke Karl assured his wife.

Bolstered by this assumption, the friendly couple planned elaborate celebrations, for it was an accepted tenet that royalty proved most susceptible to jollity when far from home. Emperor Joseph would be no exception to this rule. Well, nodded the Duke and Duchess, jollity he was to have.

But in the midst of happy preparations they faced disappointment. By return post there arrived a message from His Majesty, expressing gratitude for every proffered courtesy and coolly insisting that the travelers would stop incognito at one of the town hotels. Emperor Joseph, the "People's Monarch," was once again engrossed in his favorite buffoonery, the game of the king who thinks he despises kingship. He advertised his coming, yet wished to be unknown.

"Having escaped court routine in my own capital," wrote Joseph to his would-be hosts, "it is my earnest desire to shun formalism abroad."

Duke Karl, expansive soul that he was, could not understand. A lovely feast, a jolly party—no man in

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his right senses ought to forego such pleasures! Yet the invitation had been distinctly turned down. . . .

He could not bear rebuff. He grieved over the imperial note. He read it aloud to his wife, and together the two good people set themselves to pondering. They contemplated writing renewed entreaties couched in the most irresistible terms; they conspired, plotted, laid vast schemes. They even argued a bit. And at last Duke Karl hit upon something he seldom hit upon: an idea.

"I've got an idea," he said proudly.

"Really!" Frederica gasped in awe. "My dear Karli, what is it?"

"Just suppose," he mused serenely, "just suppose our town of Sibyllengard had no hotels. *Then* where would His Majesty put up?"

Frederica lacked imagination.

"Nonsense," she waived the point. "There is the *Silver Swan*, besides that unspeakably rowdy little inn called *Glockenspiel*."

Duke Karl smiled condescension. He often did this where Frederica was concerned, for she was a trifle foggy and not half as clever as himself.

"But those places you mention," he promised slyly,

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"they will not exist, when I am done with what I plan to do!"

Whereat she gave him one of those veiled wifely looks that told him he was wonderful. (Of course, it took no female flutter of the lashes to tell him that. He had known it all along.)

And now he set to work.

First of all he called Herr Manfred, the major-domo, into prolonged conference. After strenuous deliberations Herr Manfred emerged with a set of somewhat startling instructions. He was to visit the town's leading innkeepers, ordering them to remove all signs and shingles and to pretend that their establishments were henceforth private residences. Whatever financial loss they thereby incurred would be restored by the municipal treasury.

Next, over the entrance to his own castle, Duke Karl suspended an elaborate shield proclaiming it as the principal (and, indeed, the only) hostelry for miles around. Finally the palace personnel was carefully reorganized to meet the extraordinary demands of a doubtless extraordinary occasion.

At this point some confusion arose because there were not nearly enough people. Despite an ample

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servant staff, Duke Karl's establishment could in no wise muster the army required for the management of even a modest hotel. But the very thought of armies suggested an immediate solution: troops from the local garrison would be summoned to help out, with the ducal family itself filling sundry gaps by impersonating porters, desk clerks, chambermaids and guests (a good hotel must have guests).

Alas, there was no pastry cook! Nobody left but the ancient Town Crier who, when he was done with bellowing the passing hours, must don cap and apron for this culinary rôle. Fruit tarts and pastries of every sort would meanwhile be smuggled to the palace kitchens from the shop of Frau Kruse across the brook called Schweigenbach. It would, of course, have been far simpler to engage Frau Kruse at a reasonable fee and to establish her as mistress of the ducal sugar bin, but no blandishments seemed forceful enough to entice that recalcitrant lady. She was an artist, Frau Kruse was. She could bake in her own Dutch-tiled oven (covered with blue and white scenes from Delft) but nowhere else. Customers, however high-born, who craved her tidbits must come and fetch them at her door. She would not

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enter anybody's kitchen. No, not even that of a duke.

Duke Karl, as head of a noble and feudal household, at first intended to take over the management of his "hotel." His gray sideburns and middle-aged paunch would lend conviction to the rôle. But there were functional and domestic angles to which he was not equal. Herr Manfred had always handled everything, from the ducal purse strings to the ducal snuff; without the majordomo's solicitude it would have been quite possible for Duke Karl and his entire family to starve. Thus there was nothing for it but to make Herr Manfred head of the establishment, while Duke Karl took over the less exacting job of chief doorman. In this latter position one could always wear ornate and colorful apparel as well as an armor of impenetrable dignity, both of which were highly becoming.

Duchess Frederica did not lag behind her husband in willingness to help. After some consultation with Herr Manfred she agreed to act as châtelaine and housekeeper, a part that thoroughly delighted her. She promptly stitched a white lace cap, with apron to match, as well as a stout linen bag to hold the huge

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assortment of palace keys. With such adjuncts, not the least of which would be the merry jingle of the key bag hanging from her waist, a housekeeper was sure to command attention and respect. Frederica had no doubt of it.

Next came the daughters, Dorothea and Apollonia, who must be enlisted in the cause. Duke Karl suggested that they wield dust pans and brooms, since there was a shortage of chambermaids. But Frederica disapproved. Her girls, though plain of form and feature, were of a marriageable age—and one could never tell. There might be bachelors in the imperial suite who, while they tweaked a chambermaid under the chin and thought no more about it, could be trapped in the act of tweaking duchesses—a matter of more weight, since it might serve as prelude in a swift march to the altar. Both Dorothea and Apollonia had ample chins, and they had grown a trifle over-ripe waiting for wedding marches. There was no flaw in the maternal reasoning: a well-placed tweak would certainly help.

After careful consideration it was decided that the girls could impersonate two visiting noblewomen who came each year from their villa in near-by Stuttgart.

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As resident guests (and flower fanciers) they must show an interest in the "hotel's" rose gardens. This kept them outdoors in full view and permitted charming costume effects in the best Dresden shepherdess design. It also furnished freshly cut blossoms for twelve dozen vases which Frederica must arrange.

Then there was Great Aunt Clotilde, eager to do her bit.

Clotilde hovered around her ninetieth birthday and she was very good at fraying cloth into *charpie*, or lint, for the bandaging of wounded soldiers. During the Seven Years' War the old lady, even then nearing her dotage, had had a heyday plucking threads, for she served as local patroness of a field hospital. Since those heroic times the frenzy had never left her. Clotilde frayed. Nothing was safe from the attack of her gnarled fingers. She purloined socks and petticoats, velvet portières, damask cushions, samplers and muslin doilies, all in behalf of mercy. There were no wounded men throughout the land of Swabia, but in a towered chamber at Castle Sibyllengard the mound of lint still grew. Clotilde believed in preparedness. One day the blood was sure to flow again; and then people would come to her, pleading for bandages.

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"*Jawohl*," said the old lady, bobbing her head the while she plucked, "to me they will come!"

In the present emergency Great Aunt Clotilde became a menace. She felt certain that the Emperor of Austria journeyed over Alpine passes and highways fraught with danger. Who could say but that he might arrive on a stretcher, himself and the members of his retinue mangled by wild beasts! These were perilous times. The roads were thick with robbers, and forests teemed with ferocious stags, wolves and bears. Goodness knew what the world was coming to. But Great Aunt Clotilde would not be taken by surprise: she had her lint to stop the gore. With royalty about to lodge at Sibyllengard she planned, furthermore, to double her supply.

It was precisely this benevolent intention which threw Duchess Frederica into a panic. With Clotilde rampant on the premises, pursuing her philanthropic passion, chaos was bound to ensue. Not a tablecloth or napkin would be spared, particularly if the busy crone got wind of the actual numbers included in the imperial train. Multitudes had ever been Clotilde's meat. To promise her a mob scene now was to invite a gale of gossamer strewn about furniture

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and floors. A mere hint could whip the innocent, though crotchety, hobby into the giddiest lunacy imaginable. Quite gloriously Great Aunt Clotilde would go insane.

So they would have to lock her up. On this everyone agreed. They would brush out the cobwebs from the old round tower that rose above her little room and, together with her bales of warp and woof, they would shunt the grandam two flights upward under the eaves.

Here she could fray and ravel to her heart's content while down below the preparations for His Majesty went safely on.

There was one thing about that tower—it was haunted.

To be sure, nobody at Sibyllengard put much stock in ghosts, but it could not be denied that Great Aunt Clotilde's alcove dated back to the Crusades and had a history all its own. Among the many legends surrounding it there was that of the cruel Cunegunde, Countess of Orlamünde, who murdered her two children by piercing their skulls with a pair of knitting needles.

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A case of erotic frenzy, that of the Countess. She had been a daughter of the proud house of Leuchtenberg and was married at an early age to the last Count Otto of Orlamünde. Left a widow in 1340, she gave way to a long-nurtured secret passion for Albrecht Hohenzollern, Burgrave of Nuremberg, who was known as the handsomest man of his time. By messenger, Cunegunde made known to him that she was not inconsolable, and, more to the point, that he would make a welcome comforter.

But Albrecht had been a friend of her dead husband and, besides, he was betrothed to his own cousin. Thus he repulsed the amorous Countess with the cryptic words:

“There are two who stand between us. . . .”

Blinded by emotion, she misunderstood him, believing that he referred to her small son and daughter. Were they the obstacle that made him hold aloof? Ah, one could remedy this. She would destroy them and prove to him the full measure of her adoration.

The children often sat beside her in the round chamber of the tower where she embroidered or spun fine silk. They held the skeins of colored yarn with which she did her crewel work, her tapestries and

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knitting—for she had quite a name 'round about the countryside because of her exquisite needlecraft. Ragnhild, her daughter, was wont to exclaim with delight at the beautiful patterns, while the boy Lothar clapped his baby hands as he watched his mother's fingers.

There was magic in those fingers. They moved so fast that both children could scarcely have known what happened on that terrible afternoon after the love-crazed woman had locked the door of the sewing room behind them. She had never done this before. Nor had she ever sat so silent, without looking at the children. She even refused to finish the fairy tale begun only the day before. She just sat there plying her needles, those slender spear-like darts that clicked a sharp metallic tattoo to match the tempo of her thoughts. The Countess was knitting fiercely, furiously, with an incredible speed.

Then, suddenly, the tattoo stopped. A flash of silver shot through the air, white as a moonbeam. Ragnhild dropped senseless to the floor, small drops of blood oozing from her ears where, strangely, two shiny spikes protruded through blonde curls.

Prince Lothar, panic-stricken, stooped to look.

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Unable to grasp the full horror of what had happened, he toddled screaming toward his mother. She seemed to be waiting for him. Her open arms closed firmly about his neck. Then, for an instant, he saw the silvery flash again. But only for the fragment of a second, after which he too crumpled in a heap, his life-nerve pierced.

And now the knitting was resumed, with four gimlets the less. A shrill staccato filled the room where the Countess sat waiting for night. She plied her needles until sundown, knitting feverishly, breathlessly, with a mad haste. At last, when darkness fell, she put her labor down. Tip-toeing to the door, she turned a key and stepped into the shadowy hall. She bent over the banisters to listen, but there were no sounds. The servants, she well knew, had kitchen tasks to keep them busy at this hour, and there was no one else to question what the mistress did.

Swiftly she crept back into the room and wrapped the bodies in her satin cloak. Then she descended the winding stairs to the very end. Here, where the earth was mouldy and damp, she dug a grave with her own hands. At times her nails struck against sharp rock that made her fingers bleed, so she tore

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the large jeweled buckle from her belt and with it finished the task. The buckle, bent and damaged beyond repair, she buried with the children.

Now she returned upstairs to cleanse herself and to remove all clues from the sewing room floor. Her hands, though torn and bruised, turned white again. But there was little she could do about the spots in the wood, where the blood had dried into the grain. Forgetting her proud airs of a noble lady she knelt and scrubbed for hours, then fell back on her haunches exhausted from this unaccustomed chore. Sweat ran in rills down her forehead, mingling with the ever-darkening stain on the floor. Yet no amount of rubbing erased the tell-tale blot.

At last, in desperation, she fetched a bear skin from the manor hall and threw it across the accursed boards. Snatching her yarns and sewing tools, she locked the door and hurried from the tower, vowing to herself that she would never enter it again.

On the morrow she wrote a letter to the unyielding lover who would have none of her. The two who stood in the way, she told him, had been removed. To her own kin and palace servants she recited a lengthy fiction concerning some distant uncle of her defunct

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husband who had come to take the children on a journey. Since she had always been a charming, Guinevere-mannered and very domestic lady, her recital was implicitly accepted. She had only to wait, now, for a response to her impassioned *billet-doux*.

She waited for a week, but there was no response. Of course, one must allow for distances and bad communications over the mountain roads, since the Burgrave's castle lay high up on the crags of Sigmaringen, the seat of the Hohenzollern clan. She must have patience.

Three more days passed and still the woman waited. She could not understand. Had she not given greater proof than mortal being dared ask? Why didn't he come? Dear God, what more did he want! . . .

She paced the stony parapets of her dark castle, muttering insensate prayers. Then, for no reason at all, she thought of a small gold mesh bag which she had lately missed. For no reason at all? One day at Sigmaringen it had won *his* praise and admiration. She must find that bag.

It came to her suddenly that she had left it in the sewing room, there to await repairs of its torn lining. But she had vowed never to go there again! Still, it

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was a lovely bauble and a costly one, which she had always prized. One final visit to the tower to recover this beloved piece could do no harm. Bracing herself against her craven fears, she clenched both fists and lifted her trembling chin. On winged feet she hastened to the fatal chamber.

It was here that Fate caught up with her.

Turning the key (with which she never parted nowadays) the Countess slipped across the threshold. She lighted a candle and opened the cupboard that held her scraps of abandoned needlework.

Even as she poked among the tangled fragments she heard steps coming up the stairs.

They were heavy steps, the steps of someone masterful and strong. She recognized them instantly. Whirling about, she faced the burning gaze of the man for whom she had committed murder.

His tall frame filled the door. The flickering candle flame threw sinister shadows across his features. She should have been frightened. But that handsome face had never failed to cast a spell upon her and it did not fail to do so now. Her knees felt suddenly weak but her heart was jubilant with an

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almost forgotten ecstasy. With a wild cry she rushed forward and threw herself into his arms.

"You have come!" she gasped over and over. "Oh, my darling, you have come——"

"Yes," he replied hoarsely, "I could not keep away."

She seized his hand, clasping it to her in a delirious frenzy. She covered the bronzed wrist with her mad kisses.

"And now, my beloved," she begged, "tell me—what now?"

"I shall take you with me, Cunegunde."

"To your castle?"

"To Sigmaringen, of course——"

This was more than she had ever dared to hope for. She had longed for him to come, but that he should lead her away from Sibyllengard and raise her to the heights on which dwelled his own haughty kinsmen—this she had not asked of him.

Now her happiness knew no bounds. She clung to him, laughing, weeping, wildly demanding why he had not hastened to her the moment he received the letter.

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"Letter?" he questioned with a puzzled frown. "What letter?"

"The one I wrote you after—the one in which I said——" she recoiled from him abruptly, unable to go on.

He was still bewildered. He obviously did not know what she was talking about.

"I've been away," he told her, "on a long journey."

He explained how he had sought to make peace with his own soul so as to find strength to break his troth and to violate the oath of chivalry by taking his friend's mate; he had made a pilgrimage to Maria Zell. But the letter Cunegunde spoke of—he had not received it, for he had skirted his own castle and had come to her directly from the famous shrine.

"Oh," she breathed, "I see."

The immense relief she experienced caused her to sway a trifle, as though she had lost her balance. He leaped forward to steady her. She did not fall, but the violence of his motion caused the bear skin to rumple and fold back from the floor. A large dark splotch came sharply into view.

It was the woman's outcry that made him look down. Even then he saw only a musty stain on the

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ancient floorboards, a stain that might have been caused by resin in the grain of trees. The gold-flecked rays from the candle lent conviction to this thought.

Only now did the woman's behavior instil in him a vague and undefinable dread. Without knowing what dark forces prompted the question, he asked about the children.

"Where are Ragnhild and Lothar?"

She did not seem to hear. But in a moment there was no need for answer; her livid face told him the ghastly tale.

He, too, turned livid. An incongruous vision rose before his mind, a picture of Maria Zell whither he had gone on his unholy pilgrimage. Only, it could not be Zell—nor could it be the Madonna, towering there on a flaming throne and leering at the groveling devotees below. . . . Had not the poet Dante painted this scene of Hell?

Slowly the man mastered his horror before a fierce loathing overcame him. He seized the woman's throat and ordered hoarsely:

"Lead me to them!"

She writhed under his grip, fighting tooth and nail

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for escape. But his muscles were iron and his will was flint. Dragging her by the roan-colored braids that fell down her back, he made for the stairs. He stumbled down the tortuous spiral and at its end he found the hiding place. One kick from his boot loosened the earth, disclosing the polished buckle with which she had scraped and scooped out a shallow grave. A few handfuls of dirt and crumbling rock brushed to one side revealed the bodies, preserved by the rich lime content of the soil.

There is not much more to tell. In those grim medieval days justice was harsh and swift. The Countess, denounced by her lover, was brought to trial and found guilty. Her punishment gruesomely matched her crime, for she was walled in with her children and left to perish in that underground vault beneath the high tower of Sibyllengard.

But he, for whom she had wrecked three lives, never again found peace. Returning to Sigmaringen in the high Swabian Alb the Burgrave sought refuge from the torment of his own thoughts. He planned to free his vassals and to empty his castle of all living creatures so that he might enter the ascetic life. But Albrecht had been well beloved throughout the land

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and there was not one of his fiefs who would accept his renunciation. Instead he was besieged with entreaties to tarry among his kinsmen and to take unto himself a wife.

Bowing to the will of his subjects, Albrecht resumed his life as lord of Sigmaringen and of the Burg Hohenzollern. The cousin he had jilted returned to accept his troth. To all appearances contentment now became his lot and the crime of Sibyllengard could be forgotten. But not in the Burgrave's heart. He sank deeper and deeper into a state of melancholia from which no earthly power could rouse him, least of all the carefree laughter of his own children. In time the spirits of darkness claimed him and he withdrew from human contact to spend the balance of his years in mystic study. To peasant minds his name became a legend linked with Tannhäuser, Parsifal and Doktor Faust.

The tower of Sibyllengard, in turn, was doomed to bear the stigma of a curse. It would be haunted until Judgment Day—and, some said, longer. For the good people of Swabia cherished nothing so much as a fearsome and dependable ghost. To them the wicked Cunegunde provided a grisly thrill that never

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lost its fillip: she was heard digging and moaning, or else crooning lullabies, in her dank subterranean grave. At times, thanks to the properties of ectoplasm, she emerged from the tower and was seen trailing over the ramparts of the castle as if in search of something. On these occasions strange inhuman cries were carried downward by the wind.

"The Cunegunde calls for her lover," whispered pious burghers in the valley as they crossed themselves and prayed for Burgrave Albrecht lest, even at this late date, he fall prey to the witch.

And beyond doubt the cumulative effect of such orisons made for virtue in the uplands, since Albrecht was never known to return to the trysting place or to have commerce with the wraith. To be sure, premature gout plagued him during his middle years, which also may have curbed any desire to venture down from his pinnacled perch.

As for the temptress, desolation was her lot. Throughout the centuries she mourned the ills of unrequited passion and the far greater bane of murder twice avenged.

"It serves her right," gloated the villagers with that complacency shown by the good against the evil.

"The Cunegunde will come and get you," growled German nursemaids in an effort to browbeat their charges, "unless you hurry up and eat your porridge!"

So, throughout Württemberg, small boys and girls obediently gulped down their daily forage the while with beating heart they learned the history of the Orlamünde spook.

Despite this chronicle recorded in their annals the present heirs of Sibyllengard paid slight attention to the family ghost. They were descendants of a collateral branch, bearing the same name as the Countess Orlamünde's defunct mate, and as such they should have shunned the sinister tower rooms. Would not the implacable banshee take particular delight in harassing this odious breed? Decidedly, Duke Karl and Duchess Frederica ought long ago to have torn down the old palace wing and placed a chapel or a nunnery on its site; preferably a nunnery, since the symphony of holy thoughts thus engendered could not but lift the curse from the place.

But they had done nothing of the sort. On the contrary, they had unlocked the tower, opened shuttered windows, swept the cobwebs out and given the

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ghost quarters a thorough airing. Without a qualm Great Aunt Clotilde, who liked the view from the notorious parapet, had climbed up the winding stairs and taken possession. That is, she had moved into the lower suite of rooms that stretched out underneath the fatal sewing chamber, so that the stained floorboards above served as Clotilde's ceiling.

For years the sewing chamber itself had remained unoccupied. It was only the present crisis occasioned by the Emperor's visit which brought it into prominence again. Since every corner of the castle would be needed, the current transfer of Great Aunt Clotilde to the upper regions proved doubly useful. It kept the old lady out of mischief and at the same time provided an additional suite for the guests.

With this matter settled there still remained the problem of finding a rôle for Prince Eugene, Duke Karl's favorite nephew. Eugene was a blond and strapping lad of nineteen who combined the looks of Lochinvar with the brash verve of Siegfried. Assuredly there ought to be a proper outlet for his charm. Duke Karl, who had no son, was deeply devoted to the boy. He pondered the question from every angle and finally arrived at a decision. Cos-

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tumed in black velvet with gold braid, Eugene would be stationed as postilion at the gates. His job entailed the catching of stray travelers who might help to fill up the place.

In adding thus to the congestion already on his premises the Duke bargained for trouble. Everyone knew that respectable monarchs traveled with a retinue which an entire Swabian town might not be able to accommodate. Why, then, were strangers being lured into the castle to pose as guests, when there would soon be a premium on every inch of available space?

The answer was simple. If the ruse worked, convincing the Emperor that Sibyllengard was indeed the town's only hostelry, other travelers must be not only spoken of but actually seen. They would have to appear at meal times. They must discuss the weather, lose their baggage, complain about the bill—all in the traditional tourist manner. Above all they must remain in evidence (at least while His Majesty looked on) after which they might be pushed off some convenient precipice.

As a last detail a lantern was placed above the gate to illumine the hotel's new sign: "*Kaiserhof*" ("Em-

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peror's Inn"). Garlands of oak and ivy concealed the carved device over the lintel which bore the stag horns of Württemberg, the gold and sable lozenges of Swabia and Teck, as well as the three lions passant of Hohenstauffen. It would never do for these heraldic quarterings to give away the show.

And now all was in readiness. The play could begin.

By way of a special precaution Duke Karl had sent a scout to spy on the imperial caravan. The messenger returned with information that the Hapsburg carriages seemed to be moving in two separate columns, the larger of which, obviously comprising the bridal luggage and service staff, headed northward toward the Rhine. It would not stop at Sibyllengard at all. But the second column, flying Emperor Joseph's standard, moved briskly nearer so that its arrival might be expected shortly after dark.

Hushed with suspense, the ducal household waited. There had been no time for general rehearsals, yet each performer stood in place and concentrated on the part he had been assigned. Even Great Aunt Clotilde, peering from her tower window, shared in the excitement. Her wizened head bobbed up and down,

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in and out of sight, while with nimble fingers she frayed the collar off her jerkin.

Toward dusk a greyish cloud moved over the horizon. Drawing steadily nearer, it increased in size, until the countryside seemed veiled in a haze of dust. Now the clatter of horses' hoofs, the rumble of wheels and the blare of a trumpet could be heard. There was no doubt of it. These were the Austrians!

In a body the palace personnel stood at attention while down at the gates a single carriage, loaded to the roof with bundles and baskets of the most outlandish description, came to a halt. Two coachmen leaped to the ground and simultaneously opened the bulging doors through which now tumbled a small company of people. No sooner had they assembled by the roadside than the array of sacks and parcels came hurtling after them.

"There you are," barked one of the drivers in disgust, "them as won't pay can get out!"

"*Ka Geld, ka Kutsch*—" agreed his burly companion. ("No coin, no coach—")

With this they jumped back on the box, spat to left and right, prodded their nags and jostled off at a merry trot.

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The travelers stood in the road, a picture of bewilderment. They were very much put out, though in no sense cowed, by their extraordinary experience. Or was it extraordinary? They seemed somehow to have been through this sort of thing before.

The reception committee at the gates of the "*Kaiserhof*" paused in consternation. Judging from their appearance and their strange jabbering these creatures were most certainly not Austrians. Their carpetbags and other paraphernalia bore no semblance of a Hapsburg stamp. But it was late and the "hotel" had as yet not a single guest. If this motley band were refused admission no one else might turn up before the arrival of the imperial cortège itself. Perhaps one ought to make the best of it and show the strangers in.

Duke Karl in person undertook the task. He led the way up the great marble terrace and into the hall. Here, with every show of courtesy, he inquired whence they came and what their names might be.

He had not long to wait for a reply. The wanderers were only too eager to render account of themselves. They were a troupe of magicians out of work. Their leader, Perico Manoel, would be glad to show just what they could do.

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"Heaven preserve us!" cried the Duchess in dismay, for she would have no traffic with the supernatural.

But the Duke's curiosity got the better of him and he begged the swarthy leader for a sample of his art.

Perico Manoel paused for a moment's reflection. Since most of his magic was tied up in the baggage strewn about the floor, he had to exercise judgment, lest he undertake an inopportune feat. But something seemed to have occurred to him, for he now seized a flowing cape from one of his companions and, swirling it about his shoulders, he struck an imposing attitude. Next he clapped his hands and—out of the air, as it were—he grasped a toy violin which instantly began to play a silvery tune.

"Marvelous!" roared the Duke, while the Duchess stood speechless.

But Perico Manoel had thought of something else. While yet they gasped with wonder and awe, he caught sight of his host's two daughters. Overcome by a sudden inspiration he leaped forward and from the fichu of Apollonia's bodice extracted a life-sized grouse.

This was too much for the Duchess. Already she

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had pondered the ethics of standing here and watching the stranger at his work, but this shocking trick completely wrecked her composure. She even cast a disapproving glance at Apollonia, as if that abashed maiden could have had anything to do with it. Noting the maternal censure, the girl now burst into tears. Between sobs she vowed that while dressing—only that morning—she had most certainly not sought to bolster her maidenly bosom with live grouse.

Her daughter's outraged modesty only intensified Frederica's wrath. She turned upon the mountebank, bursting with indignation.

"Away with you!" she cried. "We have no room here for Master Cagliostro himself or his disciples!"

"Master Cagliostro," began Perico Manoel, "is the King of Magic——" but he was interrupted.

"Get out of here, all of you!"

"Night is falling," pleaded the dusky one. He spoke in liquid accents that recalled the singsong of a distant land. "My companions here, they have no place to sleep."

"Employ your magic, then. Let us see you pluck a tent out of that clematis pot!"

"Good Mistress," Perico Manoel answered touch-

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ingly, "magic works only within limits." What he really meant was that he did not carry tents.

"A grouse, yes, but no tents——" reflected the puzzled Duchess, still nettled by the affront to her daughter's decorum.

Duke Karl, on the other hand, was captivated. He yearned for more of Perico Manoel's entertaining company and so he drew his wife aside for a few lordly remarks. It was uncharitable, he told her, to turn people out in the dead of night.

"The sun is not yet over the hills," protested Frederica.

Whereat he gave her a dark masculine look that might have turned high noon to indigo.

"But what of Apollonia's fichu?" sputtered the prim Dorothea, who up to now had held her peace.

"*Je m'en fiche*," said the Duke. He did not care much for his glum daughter Apollonia.

The upshot was that the magicians stayed. They spread themselves out over Castle Sibyllengard, each in a chamber for himself. Giselle, the only feminine member of the troupe, chose the tower with its secret entrance, seven doors removed from the Duke's own rooms. This troubled Frederica. Such proximity

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between one's husband and a hoyden of the highways was unbecoming, to say the least. But like many a chaste lady before her, the Duchess took her qualms to bed and suffered in silence. Years of practice had proved this type of suffering the most satisfying of all; it led to martyrdom and the wearing of a neat, invisible halo.

Duke Karl did not admire haloes.

After his wife retired he resolved to enjoy himself. He gathered the roughly shod visitors about him and pumped them for additional feats of prestidigitation. Amid libations furnished by the ducal cellar Perico Manoel all but emptied his bag of tricks. Miniature musical instruments materialized in lush variety while Apollonia's grouse emerged now from a beaker of wine, now from Giselle's black locks or—and this was the greatest marvel of all—the Duke's own doublet and hose.

So passed an hour of devilment and cheer until, with growing darkness, the trot of a distant cavalcade was heard. Shrill trumpet blasts quivered through the air and re-echoed across the hills.

"The Emperor!" cried the postilion at the gate.

"The Austrians——" chorused the palace guards.

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Everyone was keyed once more to the highest pitch as the Hapsburg caravan drew near at last. The actors fell into their places, while Comus himself sat in the prompter's box. Swiftly the curtain rang up.



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SIXTEEN snow-white Lipizza steeds came to a halt, champing at bit and bridle. From the first carriage stepped the gallant figure of Joseph II followed by his sister, the Archduchess Maria Antonia. The blond postilion in his velvet breeches and gold braid bowed low.

"What sort of place is this?" asked His Majesty, astonished.

"It is the only inn for miles around," the postilion replied. He had almost said "Sire" when he remembered that the Emperor was traveling incognito.

"Quite imposing for a hostelry," said Joseph, tak-

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ing in the view. "I warn you that we don't intend to pay for scenery. What's the fee?"

At this the postilion paled with embarrassment. No one had talked of fees to him. To be sure, any self-respecting inn had rates for wayfarers, else how could it subsist? But at Sibyllengard the matter had been overlooked completely, since one could not think of charging an emperor for the honor of harboring his most exalted person under one's roof. But of course the Emperor was not the Emperor at the moment. Prince Eugene must remember that.

"I am the Count of Falkenstein," His Majesty was saying; "this is my sister and our suite. We should like quarters—at a reasonable price—for the remainder of the night."

Fortunately for the postilion, who was still at a loss for words, the liveried doorman now appeared upon the scene. (The elaborate set of whiskers behind which Duke Karl chose to hide would hardly have been necessary, since he and the Emperor had never met. But one could never tell when either might have run across the other's portrait. The Duke, at any rate, believed in safety.)

"Come in! Come in!" he cried with eagerness,

frowning the while on the postilion for such improper delay in welcoming the guests.

Joseph was still bent on settling the economic angle when young 'Toinette, growing impatient, disrupted the negotiations.

"Oh, thank you," she exclaimed, and her face lighted up into a radiant smile which seemed to be directed toward the postilion rather than the portly doorman, although the words had obviously been addressed to the latter.

But this was not all. The little Archduchess now pulled her brother's sleeve and urged him on in audible whispers:

"Hurry, Seppl, tell the others to get out——"

The Emperor gulped and turned a sudden crimson. Seppl!!! The Tyrolean nickname for Joseph, employed by 'Toinette—and the whole family circle, for that matter—in the privacy of Schönbrunn. . . . A peasant name, lacking in both dignity and aesthetic merit—Seppl, indeed! He ought to pull the vixen's ears for that; he ought to castigate her right here in front of everybody.

But even as his choler rose the irritating realization dawned upon him that 'Toinette was not at fault. At

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home it always proved useless to fight the obnoxious nickname (families committed atrocities in this respect) and so it had never occurred to him to warn the girl at the start of the trip. At Melk monastic regulations had automatically excluded the ladies from masculine company, so that he and 'Toinette remained out of touch. The latter part of the journey found brother and sister drowsing away the hours in the dim recess of their coach, with no opportunity for the *faux pas* to occur. What had they to say to each other—he, the man of mature years, and she, the child of fourteen? Yet it served him right for not bothering about her. He had dispensed with a rehearsal and so she called him Seppl. The fault was his alone.

Summoning what aplomb he could muster, the Count of Falkenstein made the best of a bad situation. He bowed to his sister and gave her a glacial smile.

“Very well, Countess,” he murmured, wondering if it would do to step on her dainty little foot.

Next, he turned toward the remaining company and gave the signal to dismount. From chaise and luggage van a flock of figures hopped to the ground,

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foremost among them Count Starhemberg and the Abbé Vermond.

"Our valet and our confessor," introduced the Emperor as the travelers filed up the stone flagged walk. At the head of the great stairs they were received by Herr Manfred, the proprietor.

From now on things moved at a swift pace. A cursory count revealed that Emperor Joseph's followers numbered scarcely three dozen. This proved the ducal spies correct in having surmised that the bulk of the imperial train was pushing on toward France while only the Emperor himself and his immediate suite relaxed along the way.

In the halls of Sibyllengard a noisy bustle was soon set up. Servants carried away the luggage while grooms hurried outside to aid the coachmen in putting up their vehicles and beasts. Cellar doors flew open and pages emerged with kegs of wine for the traditional cup of welcome. And at long last, with lace apron and cap awry, Duchess Frederica appeared in her dual rôle of châtelaine and housekeeper.

The Duchess had been fast asleep. Despite minor grievances (among which the recent unpleasantness about the creature called Giselle had surely been a

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major one) Frederica's slumber was profound and seldom could be interrupted by anything short of thunder. However, on this night the commotion below stairs aroused her in no time. With shaking fingers she had buttoned up her costume and donned apron and bonnet. Scuttling down darkened corridors she fumbled for her keys which dangled importantly from the strap about her waist. In all the confusion had she forgotten anything? It would be no wonder if she had, since this whole ridiculous game of subterfuge was the Devil's own machination. . . . Frederica knew as well as she knew her Paternoster that no earthly good could come of it.

Behind the Duchess raced her obedient daughters, each decked out in shepherdess finery. Although the night was black as pitch they had brought along their rose shears so as to be in character. For both Dorothea and Apollonia were conscientious; they had memorized their instructions. Whatever else might have been said against them, the Princesses were letter-perfect.

Once in the Emperor's presence the three ladies sank to their knees in reverent obeisance. His Majesty accorded them a courteous, if perfunctory, nod.

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A moment later Herr Manfred drew near, motioning Frederica aside for some indispensable stage directions. Additional hands, he informed her sharply, would be needed for pantry duty in the kitchen wing. There was no doubt that he meant her own hands and those of her daughters.

For an instant Frederica looked aghast. Horrified at the man's impertinence she scoured her mind for the proper invective to put him in his place.

But a warning glance from the Duke served to deter her and to recall the comedy of manners in which she had become enmeshed. This only added to her irritation at the whole silly business, making her more certain than ever that Castle Sibyllengard was headed for tragedy.

Well, whatever lay in store would not be of her doing. She was but a helpless wife forced to obey her lord. Women had no power over the unaccountable whims of men. Shaking her head, the Duchess held her tongue and made a dignified exit. It was practically all that she could do.

The spirited wassail that followed left nothing to be desired. Before long the sleepy-eyed magicians,

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who had tactfully retreated behind plush portières and lacquered paravents, reappeared, their nostrils dilated by happy perception of the unmistakable aroma of food. The little tribe came to life, their swaggering leader Perico Manoel acting promptly as master of ceremonies. With more dash than accuracy he took charge of introductions, naming each of his fellow-adventurers in turn, while Starhemberg did the same for the imperial party.

A disconcerting note was added by the girl Giselle, who, on being presented to the Count of Falkenstein, without suspecting that he was a Holy Roman Emperor, gayly winked at him. His Majesty was dumfounded, stiffening for a moment with regal aloofness. Who was this brazenly flamboyant creature that failed to recognize the aura of dynastic purple? Joseph, the masquerading monarch, hoped his disguise had not proved too complete; democracy was pleasant only if one could remain an aristocrat. . . .

However, a second glance at the comely wench assuaged the imperial pique. A most presentable parcel she was. Casting off eight centuries of Hapsburg hauteur, His Majesty grinned and winked back at the girl.

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Some minutes later the entire assembly had been ushered into the dining hall. Here, burdened with silver candlesticks and gold *épergnes*, a lavish table waited. Platters of venison, fowl, boar's head and other viands vied with legumes, fruits, Marzipan cakes and butter pastries. Completing this array of comestibles were twenty carafes of sparkling wine, sufficient to impart a gleam to even Starhemberg's carping eye. As for the Abbé Vermond, he had discarded all ecclesiastic inhibition.

"Blessed Saint Cyprien," cried the Abbé in unabashed delight, "but this is of a prodigious goodness!"

With promptness and dispatch the little cleric made for a chair. He tied a serviette under his chin and stropped his knife against a neighboring blade while with comprehensive scrutiny he surveyed the festive board.

The Emperor too had sat down. Wasting no time on preliminaries he was helping himself to a large bowl of noodles mixed with a white goat cheese. Beside him young 'Toinette nibbled daintily at a breast of partridge, but her appetite seemed less hearty than usual. At least, her dreamy gaze wandered more often toward the doorway where stood the blond pos-

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tilion than to the morsels on her plate. Yet, though she scarcely ate, 'Toinette was filled with some unaccountable excitement. Again and again she turned to her exalted brother, exchanging comments with him on the merits of this extraordinary place. Brother and sister found their hotel enchanting, the best they had ever stopped at.

"Why, it's just like home," exclaimed the petite Archduchess.

"And to think," roared His Majesty, "what we might have missed by going to that Duke Karl's draughty, unheated castle!"

This brought a crimson blush to the cheeks of both Herr Manfred and the ducal attendants, not to mention His Grace, who stood behind the Emperor's chair doing double duty as chief footman. The Duke perspired so freely that his wig threatened to slip and drop into His Majesty's lap. It was a tense and agonizing moment.

But at this point the indefatigable Perico Manoel rose once more to the occasion. What was a dinner, queried he, without some speeches? For one thing, it was time to drink a toast. Balancing a goblet between two fingers he stood up and declaimed:

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*"To the deeds we should not do,
To the wrongs we all must rue,
To the dreams that don't come true!"*

The Abbé Vermond, grappling with a rack of lamb, only half caught the speaker's words. He was about to pass them by and to help himself to more gravy when the opening lines re-echoed through his brain. There was something decidedly sinful about those lines, something that called for disapproval. Well, one must disapprove. It would not do for the clergy to pass up such a golden chance for moral indignation.

Wiping his fingers on the skirt of his soutane, the Abbé rose. He savored one last tidbit before smiling benignly on the assemblage; then, having caught the attention of all those present, he furrowed his brow. Fire and brimstone threatened to pour from his lips. The listeners waited in uncomfortable silence.

But the expected philippic did not come. Whether the gentle cleric was incapable of violence, or whether the partially consumed delicacies on his plate proved too much of a distraction, Vermond was plainly at a loss for words. He strained to capture some idea whereon a sermon might be pinned, but none would

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flash across the desert of his mind. The only thing that seemed quite clear was that his dinner was growing cold. This spurred him to action. Lifting his glass, the Abbé intoned a papal: "*Urbi et orbi . . .*" ("To town and sphere . . .") This sonorous phrase embraced both a present imperfect world and a more flawless hereafter. It formed a decorous suffix to the flippant motto of Perico Manoel. And, best of all, it helped the speaker to sit down again.

Emperor Joseph had meanwhile become entangled with the magicians. More specifically, he was falling prey to the wiles of the girl called Giselle. This clever damsel held forth at the far end of the table with feats of fortune-telling and palmistry. One by one she studied the life lines, heart lines, mounts of Jupiter, as well as the assorted diamond rings that went with royal palms. It was with a minimum of effort that she won her audience. Nor did this surprise her in the slightest. Dim dark ages ago the world's first gypsy laid down the axiom that no man could resist a prophecy about himself. Let the most amateurish palmist set foot in a room and all those present will hold out their hands. Giselle was used to easy victory.

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Her auguries were not without logic. To Count Starhemberg, whose expression was morose and dyspeptic, she forecast sleeplessness and grave alarms through the night. To the Abbé the cozy bliss that cloaks the just. For Marie Antoinette, budding into womanhood, there was romance. And for the Emperor, whose pockets the soothsayer planned to pick, a big surprise!

The Hapsburg guests were delighted. They seemed to be enjoying themselves hugely when the Giselle performed yet another trick entitled the Riddle of the Ring.

To do this she took a circlet from her finger and suspended it by a thin sewing thread which was exactly thirteen inches long. Next, she rested the elbow of her right arm on the table and allowed the ring to hang motionless from her thumb and index finger. It remained immobile for the mere fraction of a second; then it began to swing, slowly at first, in an ever-widening arc from left to right.

"When held by a woman who is intensely feminine," explained the Giselle, "the ring will sway from side to side. . . ."

With fascinated gaze the assembly watched. In

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effect, the golden circlet swung pendulum-fashion and with mounting speed. Judging from its rapid crescendo, the Giselle was very much a woman.

Emperor Joseph raised astonished eyebrows. What, he queried, would the thing do for a man who was—er—extremely so?

“For a man,” the maid declared significantly, “the ring swings forward and backward, crossing the feminine arc.”

Oho, that must be tried! The monarch, unmindful of his table manners, reached eagerly across a platter of *Sauerbraten* and snatched the bit of string. He was about to work the strange charm when a word from Perico Manoel stopped him.

“For eunuchs and for ladies past a certain time of life,” announced the dusky magician, “it will not work at all, whereas for hermaphrodites the ring runs in a circle.”

For a moment His Majesty was disconcerted. While none of these classifications applied to him, Joseph nevertheless would have preferred their being mentioned—well—some minutes later. Say, with the dessert, or the cheese. As it was, the Emperor felt suddenly thirsty and he begged a fresh serving of

moscatel. The string he handed on, meanwhile, to Herr Manfred.

"Here, my friend," spoke His Majesty with an encouraging nod, "show us what you can do!"

Herr Manfred coughed and cleared his throat. He eyed the proffered ring suspiciously and with profound distaste. Then, very gingerly, he held it aloft. In perfect keeping with the manner of his holding it the ring began to move—it moved gingerly, reluctantly, as though it had little interest in moving at all. The onlookers smirked, while Perico Manoel diagnosed the case.

"Such motion," said he, "lacks purpose. It is equivalent to a standstill."

He seized the slender thread and offered it to the Abbé Vermond, who raised both hands in protest. As one committed to vows of celibacy the cleric knew it would not do to measure the degree of his probity, however staunch. There were the visions and the secret thoughts known to all martyrs, saints, virgins and anchorites; the monastic life offered no respite from libido. Decidedly the Abbé craved no witnesses to such a dance as the accursed ring might well put on for him.

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Instead, the string was passed to Marie Antoinette, who held it gaily in her hand, her innocence quite undisturbed by its implication. While leers and innuendoes were exchanged the full length of the table, the circlet raced happily from side to side with all the friskiness of a newly wound clock.

"*Salut au Dauphin!*" thought the good Vermond in spite of himself, after which, overcome with qualms, he directed all his attention to the cutlet on his plate.

The girl Giselle elucidated further. There seemed to be no end to the possibilities inherent in the Riddle of the Ring.

"In Egypt and Mesopotamia," she announced, "the circlet is allowed to hang from a low beam so that pregnant women, lying under it, may learn if they will bear daughters or sons."

Perico Manoel also contributed details. "The Spaniards say that in their colonies across the sea the Indians use the witched pendulum before deciding what eggs to put under a setting hen."

"Too many male chicks are a nuisance," explained the Giselle. "Most eggs of that gender should be eaten."

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"An old Aztec custom," finished Perico Manoel. He handed the ring to the Emperor.

Once more Joseph found himself in a ticklish spot. Nor could he decide whether Egyptian or Aztec lore improved his situation. Of course, he told himself, the whole maneuver was hocus-pocus, balderdash that no sane person would believe in. Sex potency gauged by the dangling of a yellow bauble? Ridiculous. Still, it would be exasperating if even in a childish game such as this the trinket failed to do the proper thing. He didn't put faith in such rubbish, damn it, but he wanted no reflections cast upon his masculine worth. In short, he would have liked to pocket the charm and to try it out alone. Spectators, even if they said nothing, could gloat and exchange thought waves aplenty.

There was no chance to escape. Silence filled the room and eager suspense began to show on every face. The Emperor was cornered. Taking a deep breath, Joseph lifted up the string. In his heart he had vowed that if it refused to move the *right* way he would give it a push. . . .

But this was not necessary. The circlet stirred. It balanced gently back and forth, toward him and from

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him, in a gradually accelerated tempo. Presently it rocked so vigorously that it struck the imperial chest and made a clicking noise as it brushed past a button.

His Majesty began to beam. Great game—and pretty accurate, too. It all went to show that ancient folk ways were not to be dismissed too lightly, since many a truth lurked in superstition. The supernatural, when operating in one's favor, held a distinct allure.

Joseph was pleased. He did not want to surrender the ring. (To think that he had wished to dispense with witnesses. . . .) Making the most of this occasion, the Emperor settled back in his chair and allowed the bauble to have its way. Out of the corner of one eye he could observe the girl Giselle fixing her come-hither gaze upon him. There could be no doubt about it: he was furnishing his audience with a thrill.

Even the servants paused to marvel. Through an open door three white lace bonnets could be seen flitting back and forth. The cook and her two help-mates? Joseph hazarded this guess since he could not suspect Frederica and her daughters to be part of his admiring public.

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Was it indeed an admiring public? Was there no cynic among these onlookers, waiting to explode the flattering myth?

The Emperor did not enjoy this thought. Of a sudden he had acquired a new reverence for ancient superstitions, and, like most neophytes, he nursed a dark resentment against anyone still in doubt. A moment ago he himself had been prepared to snort: "Stuff and nonsense!" But now woe unto anybody who dared employ those very words.

His Majesty had turned mystic.



Digressions



AT last the meal was over. The management and staff of the "hotel" devoutly hoped that the exalted company would now retire.

But Emperor Joseph became merrier by the hour and his thoughts were not on curfew. He had grown noticeably fond of the itinerant magicians and of the hullabaloo they created. He intended to remain in their jolly company until dawn.

It was to prolong the festive mood that he proposed a game of Blind Man's Buff, much favored in that era. Herr Manfred received orders to find a

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silken band wherewith to cover the imperial eyes, since Joseph himself offered to be blindfolded before the rest of the assemblage. Prowling in semi-darkness, His Majesty hoped for more than a casual acquaintance with the alluring Giselle.

Without loss of time the game got under way. It was played heartily and with a sturdy gusto, for, in the age of the Rococo, Blind Man's Buff formed not a children's pastime but a romantic adult sport. Quite as His Majesty expected, the girl Giselle proved a substantial morsel to take hold of. Nor was she too elusive. With shrieks and little squeals of glee she managed to project her shapely person in whatever direction the fumbling monarch stalked, while Joseph, peeping shamelessly from under the silken band, loped after her with eager bounds.

While this went on, young Marie Antoinette slipped quietly aside to a flower-sheltered settee where, as if by pre-arrangement, the blond postilion joined her. They sat quite still at first. Then, shyly, they began to talk.

They spoke of things that hardly mattered. Of journeys over land, the weather, dust-filled roads, and dreams. . . . 'Toinette was weary. She looked

upon the handsome boy through a mist that veiled her eyes. Leaning softly against his shoulder—the cramped settee seemed to make this necessary—she pondered in her heart whether the Dauphin, whom she was scheduled to wed, would be like this. Charming postilion! Maria Antonia of Austria might easily be falling in love. . . .

“*Du bist so lieb*’——” she told him, in that familiar second person always permissible to royalty. (“Thou art so dear——”)

Not being weary at all, Eugene had more to say. With the self-torment of the stay-at-home he marveled at the distance covered by the travelers and presently he voiced his own burning ambition to see the world.

“Some day I shall sail the seven seas,” he announced impressively.

“How wonderful——” gasped Toinette, who had never been near an ocean. Boat rides on the Danube made up the sum of her marine experience.

Despite his sanguine predictions, the postilion fell now into a wistful mood. His eyes became round and sad as he stared at the girl.

“I suppose,” he mused, “that you are very rich.”

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'Toinette did not know. At times she had thought that Mama must be rich, but judging how hard it was to get pin-money from Mama this was certainly a mistaken notion. The family at Schönbrunn seemed rather to be on its uppers.

"Yes," said the postilion, completing his own train of ideas, "I know you are."

"What?"

"Sitting on money."

"But how do you know?" she asked, baffled. In her brief life of sitting she had noticed no coins lying around.

"Look at all your baggage!"

"Oh, that—it isn't all mine," she protested. But he shook his head stubbornly.

"You have everything," he insisted.

Ah, now he *was* wrong! 'Toinette knew just the answer to his baseless exaggeration.

"No," she cried out fiercely, "I do not have a little pug dog!" Her eyes began to swim.

Distressed, the young postilion cast about for more congenial subjects. He hoped to hold her at his side by chatting gaily of this and that. At last, when small talk was exhausted, he braced himself and called upon

the muses. It was thus that 'Toinette entered the fairyland of Swabian legend.

Forgetting that he wore the garb of a retainer, Eugene fell now into the idiom of his ancestors. Without identifying himself he lost the menial pose and spoke as that which he was, the Prince of Württemberg.

The girl listened enraptured to his tales. She learned the saga of the wild Rosswagers, a band of brigands whom 'Toinette's own forebear Rudolph of Hapsburg trounced in 1287. Their name derived from a grandsire who, while being pursued, rode to the edge of a precipice and cried out to his steed: "*Ross, wag's!*" ("Horse, risk it!") Whereupon the beast obliged by clearing the chasm in one tremendous sault.

"You know," emphasized Eugene, "that the Rosswagers were notorious for their ability to escape capture?"

'Toinette did not know. She waited, round-eyed, to be told how each of the robbers had his horse shod backwards so that the hoof-marks led away from the scene of a crime.

Next, there followed the tale of Reutlingen, near

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famous Liechtenstein. The noble family of Unruoch or Unruh, the Restless, dwelled here in a medieval stronghold which was so cunningly fortified that even members of the household went astray looking for the door. The builder himself, one Duke Ulrich, often left home on hunting expeditions and, returning, invariably missed his own address. Since enemies lurked about the bastion, wise Ulrich dared not reveal his name. Instead, he walked stealthily around the ramparts, muttering sotto voce: "*Der Mann ist da!*" ("That man is here!") Eventually this password penetrated through a sound hole and was recognized within, whereupon a drawbridge descended to admit the wandering lord.

"Passwords," explained Eugene, "were not always an unmitigated blessing, as the story of the Rosenstein will prove."

The little *Schloss* of Rosenstein stood on a hill near Gmünd. Though often besieged by enemies, the castle had for years resisted every attack. But on a certain occasion the lady of Rosenstein, gazing from a watch-tower upon the countryside below, was seen by one of her husband's foes who promptly be-thought himself of a stratagem. He wrote a highly

inflammable love letter, explaining that one glimpse of her beauty had left him stricken with a fatal passion. The *billet-doux* was tied to a pebble and tossed into the tower during the wee hours of night. When the châtelaine of Rosenstein, who was middle-aged and frostbitten, found this epistle on her sill she fell into a blissful ferment. Simmering with romantic ecstasy, she composed a coy reply which brought back a still mightier verbal onslaught. She gulped down the stranger's prevarications and took each word for current coin. She even agreed to a midnight rendezvous, arranging that the latchstring would be out provided the swain whispered a password "I come alone" and crossed the threshold by himself. . . . Alas, the scheme worked only too well. Obeying the letter of his agreement, Romeo spake the word and crossed the threshold by himself; but behind him, holding the tail of his master's tabard, followed an armed equerry. Next, clutching the equerry's coat of mail, came a squire whose skirt in turn was gripped by a captain of halberdiers. The latter's waistband served as anchor for three corporals and a pike-man, who were followed, in order of seniority, by a whole miniature army. Like a long winding chain, each link of which

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depended from the other, the enemy crept into the tower. And so the *Schloss* of Rosenstein was taken.

"Well," exclaimed 'Toinette, forgetting her incognito, "I should like to see them try that on Mama!" She was plainly disgusted with the addle-pated lady of Rosenstein.

But Gmünd offered also the extraordinary legend of Saint Kummernis. This saint was said to have been the daughter of a Spanish king who, as a parent, had only one flaw: he liked to pick his own sons-in-law. The selection made in behalf of Kummernis must have displeased the girl, for she prayed to Heaven for deliverance. Deliverance came in the sudden and vigorous sprouting of whiskers and a dark mustache on the maiden's face, whereupon the enraged father had her crucified. Since martyrdom is the surest way to canonization, images of Kummernis were carved thereafter throughout the ecclesiastic world; one, though unnamed, was placed in the chapel of Henry VII at Westminster. But at Gmünd, in the Herrgottsruh shrine, Saint Kummernis had her most popular abode. Dressed in rich vestments, she smiled down from under her mustache at prince and pauper, sinner and innocent alike. The number of her devotees

was legion. Among these there appeared one day a minstrel who, though hungry and tired from his wanderings, knelt before the image and performed a tune on his fiddle. So gratified was the saint that she kicked off one of her golden shoes toward him. The minstrel picked it up (as who would not?) and hurried to the nearest goldsmith in hopes of pawning the trinket and buying himself a sausage in its stead. But the goldsmith, recognizing the slipper, notified the authorities. The fiddler was arrested and tried for theft and sacrilege. Since no one believed the remarkable account he gave, he found himself peremptorily sentenced to the gallows. On the way to the scaffold the shrine of Herrgottsruh was passed and the wretched man implored his guards to permit him one more prayer to the blessed saint. His request was granted. Entering the dim church the minstrel once more reached for his violin and this time played a veritable rhapsody, more violent and ear-splitting than the one he had played first. It seemed to shake the farthest rafters of the tiny place, so jouncing was the tune. Saint Kummernis must have liked it very much indeed. Though no one saw her smile, she rocked and swayed a little. And lo—she must have

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kicked off her other shoe! For it came suddenly clattering down, right at the condemned man's feet. This phenomenon cleared him of the crime and sent him on his way rejoicing. Years later the poet Kerner fashioned a ballad to commemorate the tale. In Kerner's poem, for the sake of rhyme, the name of Kummernis was changed to the more euphonious Cecilia who became patroness of musicians in general and fiddlers in particular.

"But Saint Cecilia," interrupted 'Toinette at this point, "does not have a beard!"

Eugene smiled a superior smile. "Kummernis underwent certain improvements," he confided. "Among other repairs, she enjoyed a shave."

"Oh," said 'Toinette, stifling a yawn, for it was long past her bedtime, "I should have known that."

She closed her eyes while the postilion combed his memory for yet another tale. He told now of the Hörsel Berg near Eisenach which concealed the subterranean bower of Frau Venus. It was this temptress who lured the youth Tannhäuser into her cave and held him many years under her spell. Emerging finally for a breath of air, the youth was overcome by remorse, and he resolved to make a pilgrimage to

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Rome in expiation of his sins. In Italy he sought absolution from the Pope. But the Holy Father showed himself adamant, thundering: "You will find forgiveness when my staff puts forth green leaves!" This, of course, was unreasonable; so Tannhäuser went on his way. Strangely, the Pope's stick soon broke out in knobs which presently developed into buds. By Candlemas the buds had sprouted further until the rod of Saint Peter was covered with foliage. This left the Holy See no choice: if God relented the Pope could do no less. Messengers went forth from the Vatican with instructions to find that handsome and repentant young man who had called there only a short while ago. But the Knight Tannhäuser was nowhere to be seen. He had gone back into the mountain and no papal blessings could induce him to come out again. . . .

At this stage of his narrative Prince Eugene was overcome by a fellow-feeling for Tannhäuser. In an excess of sympathy he blurted out:

"That is just what I would have done—gone back into the mountain!"

The girl beside him sat bolt upright, slowly opening her eyes. She blinked and looked about in be-

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wilderment which changed to rapture as her gaze met that of the adoring postilion. To be sure, she did not understand his sudden outburst of emotion. She blushed apologetically, slipping her arm through his.

For Marie Antoinette had been fast asleep.

The Abbé Vermond did not play Blind Man's Buff. He deemed so frivolous a pastime unbecoming to his station. Instead, while Emperor Joseph frolicked with the other guests, the cleric enjoyed a quiet tête-à-tête in the company of Herr Manfred, the majordomo.

The two men had one interest in common: botany. Vermond, like most ordained priests of that day, was an apothecary of sorts. He knew thousands of herbs and medicinal roots by name. Never a call for poultices, pain-stilling drugs or other nostrums but the learned Abbé could supply the need. He was an expert at a form of homeopathic treatment for all ailments, mending bone fractures with a salve and melancholia with a small white pill. The storehouse for his somewhat diffused knowledge was nature's garden.

He found a kindred spirit in Herr Manfred, who

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revealed himself as an amateur horticulturist. No sooner had this fact been established than the happy pair retreated to an open window whence the majordomo pointed through pitch darkness to his flowerbeds below. Swabia was the naturalist's paradise, he boasted. Nowhere on earth could rarer plants be found than here in the heart of Württemberg.

The Abbé, who had visited Asia Minor and knew a thing or two about the Orient, felt tempted to protest. But he let it pass, checking himself just in the nick of time. After all, his purpose was to learn what Swabia had to offer. It made no difference how a native son chose to appraise it. He therefore encouraged Manfred to go on.

Manfred did. Just now in April, he declared, the blue *scilla bifolia* and the small-leaved purple Lungwort (*pulmonaria angustifolia*) were in bloom. The month of May would bring White Coltsfoot (*tussilago alba*) and Mountain Alice (*Alyssum montanum*), while June heralded Red Gromwell (*lithospermum coeruleum*) with the Moon Flower (*lunaria rediviva*) and Spring Gentian (*gentiana verna*). A wild profusion of scent and color reigned through July: the Burnet Rose (*rosa spinosissima*), Yellow

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Meadowrue (*thalictrum flavum*), Eagle's Wing (*aquilegifolium*), Broomrape (*orobanche minor*), Mountain Crown (*coronilla montana*) and the gorgeous Pyramidal Orchid (*orchis pyramidalis*). August continued with the aforesaid splendor, adding Yellow Gentian (*gentiana lutea*) to the bright parade, while in September, just before the first nipping frosts of autumn heralded death, the Gilded Foxglove (*digitalis aurea*) burst triumphantly upon the scene.

It all sounded impressive. Herr Manfred could be, and indeed was, proud of his recital. He felt that the Abbé would appreciate all those Latin terms, apart from some startling disclosures he had yet to make about the Edelweiss found on the near-by Alps.

But Vermond had grown tired of flowers. He coughed and changed the subject.

"Tell me about that strange plant from America," he said.

"Ah," beamed Herr Manfred, "the potato?"

The Abbé nodded. "One hears in Austria that this wondrous plant bears a fruit which tastes like bread——"

"Better than bread, my friend!"

"But how did you get it?"

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The majordomo puffed up his chest. "It is a long story," he said. "It begins with the Hessians who were hired out to fight overseas. When they returned to Europe they brought potato tubers with them——"

Giving full rein to his garrulity, Herr Manfred spun the quaint tale of the first bulbs planted by a miller's wife at Gutenberg in 1680. Believing them a species of tulip, the good lady had selected a spot in her flower garden. In due course lavender blossoms appeared which turned into berries, first green, later purple. Since they looked luscious, she tasted one, but speedily spat it out. Clearly the fruit needed cooking. Employing her favorite recipe for jam, the miller's wife next set to work on the potato berry and, when her preserve jars were full, she invited her friends to partake of the exotic American dish. The friends came, savored and ran off with wry grimaces, as the concoction proved impossible to swallow. . . . For the miller's wife the occasion was a mortifying fiasco. How could she ever live down such disgrace? The whole town would brand her as a wretched Hausfrau! Enraged, the unhappy woman ran into her garden and tore up every plant from the

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roots, to be thrown on a rubbish heap and burned with other useless weeds. She stood by as the pile smoked thickly. Meanwhile, under the crackling flames, the ripe potatoes baked until they burst open and spilled out their mealy hearts. The miller's wife sniffed, her nostrils catching a rare aroma. She took a branch and poked about the dying blaze until the crisp, well toasted potatoes rolled out. Scarcely waiting for them to cool, she stooped to take a bite. And now her sorrow turned to joy, her erstwhile humiliation to pride. She called back the mocking guests and cured them of their mockery, for the *Erdapfel* (apple of the earth) as she now named her miraculous fruit, won their glowing praise.

"And to think that we have potatoes every day!" finished Herr Manfred casually. "Of course, it is all due to those clever English——"

"*Les anglais?*" demanded the French Abbé, who did not care for Britain. "What is it you mean?"

Manfred explained what he meant. "Those clever English," he repeated, "they do things much better than the rest of us. They always arrive first and take the best slice of the cake."

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"Even so——" muttered Vermond, knitting his brows.

"Even what?"

"They are about to lose the biggest slice. There are rumors of rebellion at this moment in the American Colonies. A countryman of mine, Marquis de Lafayette, is planning to cross the seas and to aid in the revolt."

Herr Manfred laughed a jovial laugh. "Nonsense, my good man! It would be a useless struggle of brother against brother, like Guelph and Ghibelline, leading to no profitable end."

"It is the struggle of a child that has outgrown its parent," persisted the Abbé.

But Manfred was no less stubborn. "Guelph and Ghibelline," he reiterated, "and by the way, behind that butte just over there lies Altdorf-Weingarten, the birthplace of the clan of Guelph. Are you acquainted with their history?"

Vermond was not and he would have liked to add that he didn't care, but Manfred had already started.

The Guelphs, he said, were descended from Count Eisenbart of Altdorf-Weingarten, whose wife was an excessively chaste lady named Ermintrude.

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"Chastity can never be excessive," broke in Vermond sternly.

Manfred paused to consider whether he ought to amplify his statement, but he was impatient to get on with the story and so he passed the matter by. It happened, he continued, that in the environs of Altdorf a poor woman gave birth to triplets. When Countess Ermintrude heard of this she denounced the peasant mother as an adulteress who obviously had had converse with three different men. "She ought to be sewed up in a sack," hissed Ermintrude, "and drowned in Lake Constance!" But next year, while her own husband went on a journey, the Countess came down in labor pains and was delivered of six small sons. This was a dreadful shock. Remembering what she had said of the peasant woman, Ermintrude could not face the bawdy implications that must attend her own accouchement; she gave five of the babies to her maid with orders to drown them in the river. As the servant carried a hamper down to the water's edge she met Count Eisenbart who chanced to be galloping home. He stopped her, asking what she had in the basket. "Only some whelps the mistress told me to destroy," stammered the fright-

ened maid. At this the Count, who was a kettle-peeking husband, lifted the lid and saw the children. The deplorable secret leaked out. Then and there Count Eisenbart bade the girl to keep silent and to take the infants to a foster mother for safekeeping. . . . Six years went by, during which the boys were not seen in the neighborhood of the castle. But in the seventh year Count Eisenbart ordered them brought to him, all dressed alike in scarlet silk. Confronted by their remaining brother it now appeared that the children resembled each other and their father to such a degree that no doubt could exist regarding their paternity. This was what Eisenbart had wished to establish before meting out punishment to his wife; Ermintrude stood accused as a would-be murderess, yet not as an adulteress to boot. In the great hall of *Schloss Altdorf-Weingarten* the Count sat in judgment with his knights, and their united verdict was death to the unnatural mother. On hearing this the Countess fell at her husband's feet, imploring mercy. Eisenbart relented. But in memory of the occasion he decreed that all his line should be known henceforth as the *Welfe* or *Whelps*, a name later Italianized

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to Guelphs, due to the family's removal to the Dolomite region.

"Of course," commented Herr Manfred at this juncture, "now that you know about the Guelphs I ought to tell you about the Ghibellines."

Vermond made a weak protest. "If you must," he said feebly. But Manfred had already taken up where he left off.

"Being related by blood, the rival clans bore such resemblance to each other that on the battlefield identification became necessary. During an armed tussle there was constant shouting of 'Here, Guelphs!'—'Here, Ghibellines!' lest someone make a mistake."

"Yes, but you were going to say——"

Manfred frowned at the interruption. He wished Vermond to understand that a born storyteller, though he may digress, returns invariably to the point. Still, the Abbé wanted to make sure that such would be the case.

"You were going to explain," he repeated, "why Ghibellines called themselves Ghibellines."

"Ah——"

The majordomo's face took on a pensive mien. "The Ghibellines," he began, "were known as

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Ghibellines because they came from a hamlet named Giebling——”

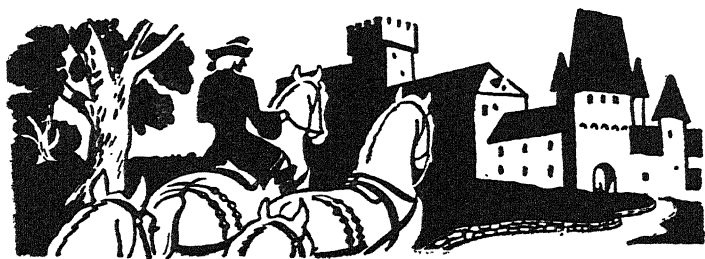
“Is that so?” queried Vermond, somehow disappointed.

The other made a vague gesture over the nocturnal landscape. “Yes, they say it was on the site where now stands Weiblingen, yonder behind the Hohenstauffen cliffs.”

A distinct sense of anticlimax caused the Abbé’s eyes to look a trifle blank.

“And is that all?” he faltered, dubiously.

“Yes, that is all,” said Herr Manfred as he closed the window.



The Emperor's Sash



EMPEROR JOSEPH had had enough of play. He had caught the girl Giselle (or allowed himself to be tagged by her) better than a dozen times and, though the maid was plainly willing to prolong the sport, pursuit was beginning to pall. In fact, just for a change, His Majesty chased Starhemberg.

After a few rounds of this the Emperor stifled a yawn. He begged for a candle and went to bed.

Duke Karl, still faithful to the rôle of doorman, showed the royal guests upstairs while the Duchess gave orders for hot water to be fetched from the great cauldrons in the palace kitchen. When the

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steaming pitchers had been delivered from room to room Frederica explored the linen cupboards in search of towels. Dorothea and Apollonia distributed these in turn, although their mother reserved for herself the privilege of waiting upon His Majesty.

Joseph had just put down his sword and gold-embroidered sash when Frederica knocked.

"*Herein!*" he grunted in a voice grown heavy with much wine. ("Enter!")

Coyly she entered, dropping her best curtsy. With her rounded figure compressed into a housemaid's corselet and skirt, Frederica looked the part of a buxom peasant wench. She was fortyish and not a bad parcel at that. Despite her two grown daughters, the Duchess still enjoyed stealing glances in a mirror.

She swayed a little from the hips as she now tidied up the chamber, dusting a table and rolling back the plum-colored spread from the four-poster bed. With loving precision she placed five towels in a row beside the painted washstand. Lastly she fluffed the imperial pillow to an inviting roundness. And it was at this point that Joseph, in a mood for banter, slapped her firmly on the bustle.

Frederica almost lost her balance. She reared and

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choked for breath but she was too utterly astounded to recover speech. Only one thing could be done to save her dignity, and Frederica did it. Blushing furiously, the Duchess of Württemberg flounced from the room.

Shaking his periwig the Emperor smirked to himself as he undressed and stretched out on the bed. Before snuffing out the candle he heaved a deep contented sigh, reflecting on the charms of this merry Swabian land. It was a country where by a foregone conclusion the masculine sex had an easy time of it. Was it not here that during the siege of Weinsberg in 1139 the conquering Conrad Hohenstauffen had proclaimed his intention of killing all male citizens, while permitting the women to escape unharmed and to carry away what they most prized? And, pray, what did the ladies do? They trudged out through the city gates, each hoisting on her back a lover, husband, son or brother. Which accounts for the ditty:

*"If I should take it in my head
To marry, I'll in Weinsberg wed"*

Joseph enjoyed his Swabian visit. He had relished the food, the necromancy of the ring, the game of

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Blind Man's Buff and last, but certainly not least, that bit of badinage with the robust chambermaid. Besides, this hotel was a nice place. He felt exceedingly lucky in having come upon such comfortable lodgings; even the sheets and coverlets were tolerable for an obscure provincial inn. He would give these good people a boost by mentioning them on his future travels. But for the present he must catch some sleep.

This was more easily said than done, in view of the Emperor's measurements. Like most Hapsburgs, Joseph was tall, and so his feet hung over the base of the bed. In trying to adjust himself he pushed up toward the headpiece, only to collide with an elaborate piece of woodcarving. Emitting a sturdy oath, the monarch shot up to a sitting position and reached for the shaded night light that glimmered beside the bed. He faced about to stare at two ebony birds.

"*Heiliger Satanas!*" swore His Majesty. "Those are the ravens of Saint Meinrad——"

The birds so named had long been a traditional badge of the proud Hohenzollern clan. This house, like countless other dynasties, originated in Swabia. It embodied in its lore a brace of ravens that foretold impending disaster ever since Count Meinrad, the her-

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mit of Zollern, had been murdered in the wilderness by a marauding band.

As a Hapsburg, Emperor Joseph had no use for Hohenzollern birds. But he knew ravens to be creatures of bad omen and he most certainly did not want them perched above his pillow.

Resolutely he reversed his own position in bed so that his head rested against the footboards which formerly had stubbed his toes. This was not much of an improvement. For now the creatures, discernible in the semi-darkness, fell in direct line of vision whenever he opened his eyes. They forced themselves upon his consciousness, arousing a deep-rooted resentment. Those upstart Hohenzollerns, fumed His Majesty, they were not even original while choosing their harbingers of gloom! Even in ancient Greece, murder had been disclosed by feathered witnesses—to wit, the cranes of Ibycus. . . . And the old Hohenstauffen tribe, so long extinct, did it not own a whole covey of sacred ravens? They floated and swarmed over the mountain of Kyffhäuser where ancient Barbarossa slept his long sleep, trying to prove to himself that he was not dead. . . .

To an enlightened Hapsburg it all seemed exces-

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sively silly. Emperor Joseph, at any rate, longed only for some rest during the balance of this night, and unless the birds were obliterated it did not look as if he would get it.

Moodily the monarch rose and paced the floor. He shuffled on bare feet across the room in search of his clothes. With a loud clatter his sword slipped from a chair and pitched to the floor, while one of the imperial shoes skidded viciously away into the shadows underneath a clothes-press. But at last the Emperor found what he was after: a jaunty shako and Joseph's own levitka, replete with Golden Fleece and jewel-studded sash.

Shambling back to bed he tossed the fur-trimmed coat over the offensive headpiece, smothering the ravens below. Next, he crowned the whole by balancing his shako across the top.

"*Ach*," sighed His Majesty with satisfaction, "a man needs only to be clever."

He doubled up his giant frame and went to sleep.

There was a storm during the night. In the dark hours before dawn all the forces of Hell seemed to have broken loose to fall upon a defenceless world.

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The firmament was torn by flaming gashes of lightning while living creatures shuddered under the impact of fierce thunder. It was a tempest the like of which no inhabitant of Württemberg could recall. Not merely did the gale sweep about Sibyllengard and the foothills near by, but its fury was felt throughout the Swabian countryside. And it was during this night that an ancient spook returned to life: the Countess of Orlamünde walked again.

It was the girl Giselle who first reported seeing the apparition. Having chosen the tower for her sleeping quarters, the gypsy wench had slipped into her alcove bed shortly after midnight. She had been slumbering for about two hours when something awakened her. At first, noting the oncoming storm, Giselle had assumed that the wind slammed one of the open shutters. But on closer inspection she found the shutters intact. Meanwhile there was a scraping noise just outside the door. It stopped for a moment, then continued as though moving farther away. Holding her breath, the Giselle waited. But not for long. The suspense proved too much for her. Drawing the bolt, she ran out into the narrow passage just

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in time to see a slender wraith disappearing down the winding stairs.

At least, such was the girl's story when—only a few minutes later—she encountered Duchess Frederica in the great manorial hall.

"The thing slipped noiselessly downward," reported the Giselle, "I could not hear a single step, yet after it was out of sight there seemed to be a thin eerie wailing in the air—as of a ghost weeping. . . ."

"Rubbish," said Frederica, who had her own thoughts regarding the girl's restlessness, "I never heard of a ghost able to weep!"

She resolutely marched down the corridor, locking all doors that appeared in her path, including that of the Duke. But the Giselle must have been too afraid for further sleep, for she did not return upstairs to her turreted bower. Instead, she vanished into the shadows that filled the haunted *Schloss*.

As the storm mounted and beat about the quivering structure a medley of inexplicable noises arose. Doors were banged shut and floorboards creaked as though a host of invisible feet padded softly through the darkness. Occasionally a metallic screech mingled with the tinkle of broken glass only to be drowned

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by the loud gurgling of water which came spattering down the rain spouts and into the stone quadrangle below. Even the horses in the stables seemed to be in an uproar, for there was much snorting and neighing as well as the echo of hoof-beats through the night.

But at last daylight broke and the elements began to quiet down. A radiant sun rose over the dank bedraggled earth and the caroling of birds greeted the morning. Sibyllengard opened its windows to admit the warming rays and to expel the dampness that was prone to settle in its sandstone walls. Slowly the nervous household awoke to life. And it was now that Frederica discovered the tragedy: someone had made off with the ducal plate.

Herr Manfred, the majordomo, had really been the first to notice that something was amiss. He had stumbled across a silver skewer lying on a carpet off the main entrance. On picking it up and hurrying with it to the dining hall he had met Duchess Frederica on her way below stairs. They paused and talked about the events of the night, including the strange location of the skewer. Suddenly a grave suspicion filled Frederica's heart. Snatching the delicately

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arved tool from Manfred's hands she rushed into the dining hall, only to emerge presently in a state of distraction.

"Look—" she cried, choked with emotion, "the silverware—it is gone! They have carried every bit of it away——"

She motioned the majordomo to enter while with fluttering hands she pointed out the open drawers and cupboards which gave upon a yawning emptiness. In truth, the room had been divested of every gleaming fork and dish. The ancestral plate of Sibyllengard had vanished.

Even as she surveyed the dismal scene Duchess Frederica received a further shock as two disheveled grooms came scurrying up the servant passage to report that twenty-two thoroughbred horses were missing from the ducal stables. A frightened chambermaid confirmed the worst suspicions by adding that the rooms occupied by the dusky Perico Manoel and his companions were abandoned and showed no signs of having been slept in during the night.

"Those demons," cried the Duchess as she clutched the skewer, the only remaining silver piece, mournfully to her breast, "they did it!"

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Herr Manfred was not quick to grasp hidden meanings. "What demons?" he inquired cautiously, for he was not one to trifle with Beëlzebub or his cohorts.

"Those gypsies who called themselves magicians!"

Frederica strangled a sob. She felt a queer mixture of triumph and chagrin at having foreseen some sort of trouble from the start. But no one had listened to her. And now the worst had come to pass: with an emperor on its premises, Castle Sibyllengard could not even set a proper table. The ducal house of Württemberg had sunk to the lowest depths of degradation.

It happened that she was wrong. Greater humiliation was yet in store when presently the tidings spread that Emperor Joseph also had been robbed. Somebody had purloined the monarch's gold-embroidered sash. What was worse, Joseph suspected the Duchess. That is, he did not know the person he suspected was the Duchess, but he confided his conjectures to the Duke.

"Those serving wenches," quoth His Majesty in private, "they take advantage of the slightest—er—paternal gesture."

The statement flattered Frederica's age, but for the

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rest blackened her character almost beyond redemption. On learning of the slur that had been cast in her direction the good lady promptly dropped into a dead faint.

They used a bucket of fresh rain water to revive her, after which a secret family council was held. While Emperor Joseph skulked through the castle with an angrily protruding Hapsburg lip, Duke Karl and his small circle fretted over a solution to the well-nigh hopeless maze.

What to do? Would it be wiser to spread the alarm and clamp down on the fleeing thieves (thereby giving away the hoax and earning His Majesty's scathing reproof) or to remain silent and to see it through?

The conclave struggled valiantly to find an answer. When it disbanded half an hour later the answer had not yet been found, but everyone agreed to a somewhat vague conclusion that something must be done.

During the balance of that day something was done.

First Marie Antoinette, drifting visibly into romance, gave ear to a curtain lecture by her alarmed

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brother who had come upon the maid only that morning as she leaned flirtatiously over a balcony and gazed down at the postilion below. The postilion, His Majesty observed, gazed steadfastly back. It was outrageous, and Joseph meant to put a stop to such nonsense. The Archduchess must be packed off at once to France. In the sedate company of Starhemberg and the Abbé Vermond she was hurried away that afternoon, without so much as a parting word from the romantic youth whose identity she now would never know. Emperor Joseph, meanwhile, remained behind to clear up matters.

Clearing up matters consisted largely of stern conversation over a bottle of tart wine served by Duke Karl, who soon doffed cap and porter's uniform in order to identify himself.

"I am Karl Eberhard, Your Majesty," blurted the guilty lord, "—reigning Duke of Württemberg and Prince of Swabia——"

The Emperor choked over a newly filled tankard. He leaned back in his chair and glared ferociously, saying nothing.

"This hostelry," continued the penitent Duke, "it is no inn at all, but my poor castle——"

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"*Heiliges Musketenrohr!*" ("Holy musket barrel!") bellowed Joseph who, though flabbergasted, had recovered speech.

And now a twinkle appeared in the imperial eyes, its glow spreading across the long lean Hapsburg face. Resounding laughter. Embraces.

"My beloved Cousin——"

"My exalted Cousin!"

Duke Karl tore off his false mustache. He unbuttoned his livery and displayed a princely cordon. This badge of sovereign brotherhood united him with his distinguished guest. It symbolized the bond existing between members of dynasties both high and low who, even if they never met, considered themselves relatives under the skin. Such a cachet made life on Olympian heights a trifle less lonely.

A catalogue of explanations followed to the vast amusement of Emperor Joseph, who begged to hear each detail over and again. For was he not the son of histrionic Maria Theresia? The costumed antics at Castle Sibyllengard delighted him no end.

In the midst of the general mirth, however, Joseph bethought himself of something.

"We ought to catch those thieves," he affirmed

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politely. He hoped no one would take this delicate suggestion amiss.

Oh, yes, the thieves . . . Duke Karl had almost forgotten about them. But now he was galvanized to action. Recovering the seignorial manner, which as chief doorman of a country tavern he had been forced to drop, His Grace issued orders. Rural police and palace guards were to go forth and spread the alarm; the culprits must be chased on horse or foot. And, since the dukedom was well run, their capture would be certain.

"We'll have those rascals in irons before night," Duke Karl announced confidently.

Herr Manfred meanwhile had been delegated to inform Duchess Frederica and her daughters that the comedy of errors was at an end. After some hasty primping the ladies reappeared, no longer in their fetching disguise, but as the noble châtelaines they in truth could call themselves.

Alas, Frederica looked decidedly less youthful without bonnet and ribbons, so that Emperor Joseph felt not the slightest urge to repeat his earlier prank of swatting her bustle. He shivered instead at her matronly mien, for Frederica was wreathed in chilly

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smiles and girded with unshakable composure. Quite as if nothing had happened, the Duchess curtsied to His Majesty while Apollonia and Dorothea blushing awaited their turn. It was a neat performance, far more creditable than the mummery that had gone before.

The occasion obviously called for more wine. Beakers were filled and goblets emptied in confirmation of renewed amity between the ducal and imperial houses. His Majesty proposed to drink everyone's health in turn, including that of the postilion who had been summoned to make his bow as Prince Eugene. But Eugene's heart was heavy and he barely tasted of the proffered cup.

When all those present had been toasted, Duke Karl suggested honoring a few absentees. Joseph fell cheerily in with the idea. He invoked Austria's redoubtable Maria Theresia, Poland's handsome Stanislas Poniatovsky, Prussia's misogynist Frederick II and, lastly, the Bourbon Louis Quinze.

It was Louis Quinze who caused him to remember 'Toinette, the little Archduchess who was on her way to France.

The Emperor's Sash

"*Messieurs, Dames*—the most important toast of all!"

Glasses were raised in tribute to the bride and future Dauphiness who at this very moment sat between Starhemberg and the Abbé, speeding westward toward Versailles.

"*Servus, Maria Antonia!*" rang the Hapsburg salute, and through it echoed no small measure of pride.

For everybody, with the possible exception of Eugene, felt that the girl so hailed was making a very fine marriage.



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YES, YOUNG 'Toinette was
on her way to France.

The plumed and flower-decked barouche in which she rode had rumbled through Tübingen, Freudenstadt, Offenburg and Kehl. It now reached the banks of the Rhine where amid jostling onlookers the Archduchess and the vanguard of her cortège were reunited.

There was much gentle weeping of recognition as 'Toinette embraced each of her intimates in turn: Governess Judith von Brandeiss, Court Physician Ingenhouse and the stalwart ayah, Frau Weber. For days the puzzled attendants had waited at the out-

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skirts of Strassburg, little suspecting such an escapade as that which had transpired at Sibyllengard. Where was the imperial convoy? What had happened to the Dauphin's bride-elect? Frau Weber suggested that the whole thing might well have been called off. Perhaps there would be no wedding and, as sometimes happened, the Schönbrunn chancelleries had forgotten to notify the stranded suite.

But no. 'Toinette's arrival dismissed all these alarms. Having passed from irritation to boredom, the imperial attendants now quickened with a restored sense of importance. They were called upon to function; life had regained its meaning.

In a body the regal escorts gathered now about their princess, leading her to the river's edge. Barges crowned with baldachins that bore the imperial colors ferried the travelers toward a flat sandbank in mid-stream, where the ceremony of transference was to take place.

'Toinette looked pale. Throughout the journey from Swabia she had dwelled in a dream world of her own. Her thoughts clung doggedly to a beguiling vision of Prince Eugene, who in her candid memory was but a fair lad in a black and gold pos-

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tilion's coat. Black and gold. . . . Black and gold. . . . Only since parting from him did she realize that he had been clad in her own colors: the sable and gilt of Hapsburg's banner. This trifling circumstance seemed strangely fitting, since she knew herself to be drawn to him by the heart's true kinship and by other bonds equally subtle. He spoke her tongue, not merely in its vocals but in essence and spirit. The fleeting moments they had spent together, surrounded by the din of raucous voices, had been high adventure in a realm of enchantment. Hand in hand she seemed to have drifted with him into the kingdom of romance. At Castle Sibyllengard Marie Antoinette's morning of life had been made radiant by youth's eternal dream.

Her life was less radiant now. And, as it moved toward the zenith, it would encounter the bleakness of despair. For 'Toinette's fate was ruled by an evil star.

Happily she was unaware of this. Clutching her ribboned hat, the brim of which was beating about her ears, she now rocked toward the island. A few minutes later she leaped from the barque and entered a wood pavilion that rose above the churning waters

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of the Rhine. Here, in a triumphant gesture of neutrality, the master minds of two sovereign nations coped with the problem of transforming an uninitiated Austrian princess into a canonical French queen.

"Stripped to the buff," so reads the document recording the proceedings, "*Madame La Dauphine* entered her new realm. . . ."

The official dossier does not state that 'Toinette wept. But in the notes of her French lady-in-waiting, Comtesse de Noailles, a more accurate picture emerges. Tears flowed quite copiously, it seems, because the small Archduchess had not wanted to undress. Apart from considerations of modesty, the act of disrobing involved acute discomfort since the pavilion was a purely provisional structure nailed together for a day. Through the unheated antechamber, filled with solemn frocked delegations, blew a lusty gale straight from Holland and the North Sea.

Frankly, 'Toinette was cold.

She balked and became rebellious on another score, which led to a squabble. For 'Toinette owned a locket and a set of pretty garters which she wanted very much to keep. These pieces had no value in them-

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selves, but they embodied some absurd and tender memory of home. Still, they were Austrian, and it was her duty now to leave all Austria behind.

She clutched at her possessions, fighting tooth and nail. She defied the disrobing woman who would take them from her. Once, to the horror of the Viennese suite, 'Toinette actually screamed. She wanted to go home.

This was mutiny, no less! It called for action from Starhemberg who was the highest authority in charge. The Imperial Chamberlain stepped forward. Ignoring 'Toinette's stage of undress (she was in her cami-sole and pantalettes) he delivered an impressive sermon. This was followed by a few words from Governess Brandeiss, who recalled the Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac. Abraham, 'Toinette heard, so loved the Lord that he had been prepared to slaughter his own son Isaac in proof thereof. . . . Surely that was a great deal more than giving up a garter or a home?

Under the impact of such grave recriminations the girl saw reason. She bowed to the inevitable, grasping dimly that she had been singled out to be a pawn in the chess tournament of kings. She knew the world

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needed peace, and Austria was handing a live princess over to France as a pledge to stop all war and bloodshed. Yes, it was very much like the tale of Abraham and Isaac, except that 'Toinette could not see why God wanted Isaac in the first place—especially since God didn't mean it, and Abraham must have suffered a dreadful fright before he found out it was make-believe. Well, perhaps Austria and France were playing a make-believe game?

It was Frau Weber who blasted this fond hope. As nurse to the imperial children, she had taught 'Toinette her first prayers. Today the rugged disciplinarian pointed to an unanswerable tenet of faith—the cleansing of the world's sins by a sacrificial Lamb of God. If Jesus, who was King of Kings, had shown himself so great, dared she—a princess—prove too small? Frau Weber wished 'Toinette's reply on that.

Oh, no. 'Toinette didn't dare. She knew about *noblesse*; it obliged. Frau Weber said a Crucifixion was required before Jehovah forgave the sins of the world. It was only logical to suppose that if The Lamb could not be spared, there was no hope whatever for Maria Theresia's daughter.

From this point forward the proceedings went off

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without a hitch. Gulping down a sob, 'Toinette dried her tears. Meekly she surrendered her baubles and parted with each familiar sheath. Denuded of all but her bewildered soul, Maria Antonia Josepha Johanna of Hapsburg entered France.

The step she took was a decisive and an irrevocable one. With it went far more than the usual bride's sense of finality—with it went a subconscious acceptance of doom.

Not that at fourteen 'Toinette had the slightest tendency toward heroics. Far from it! If anything, she was a badly frightened rabbit longing for its native lettuce patch. She missed Schönbrunn. But instinct told her that childhood's garden had been barred and there was no return. In some measure this simple truth is known to every adolescent.

Once hard facts had been faced 'Toinette drew herself up rigidly against further pain. With the brash elasticity of youth she gained a new footing. She must look forward, not back. Under a lip that quivered visibly her chin was held high.

French frills and laces rippled about her now, disguising the inept childish form. Puffs, draperies and

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ruchings filled their age-old mission of supplying feminine bulges above and below a waistline pinched by crafty stays. Outwardly at least, the Viennese "*Backfisch*" (flapper) had become a Parisian woman of the world.

Even more rapidly than her dress the scene about her began to change. There was the hysteria of leave-taking from an Austrian suite which retreated at the exact moment that the French delegation moved forward. Now 'Toinette found herself surrounded by a swarm of chattering strangers. They lifted her into a satin-lined coach which presently tore across country at a spanking pace. Through lower Alsace the journey led over Meurthe et Moselle, the Meuse, the Marne, toward Oise where the forest of Compiègne came into view.

Here, under a canopy of trees, the Bourbon picnic was still in full progress. Some members of the royal party had discovered a waterfall which gurgled merrily down a sheltered gorge. Though shy of anything that might approach immersion (baths were shunned in the Rococo) courtiers and regal demoiselles had doffed their stockings for a bit of wading. With shrieks of glee the ladies hopped about, pursued

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by eager males who slithered boldly across the pebbled stream-bed. It was in the midst of these gay antics that a bugle call announced the arriving cavalcade.

Scrambling ashore, the splashers made a hasty toilet. With dripping skirts and clammy ankles they darted through the forest toward the clearing where King Louis XV and his assembled family stood waiting. They were just in time. For at the turn of the road 'Toinette's glass coach had come to halt.

Twelve page boys bounded forward unfurling a vast length of carpet over which the Archduchess walked. On dainty feet, which for sheer grace would soon be the talk of Europe, Marie Antoinette approached. By his elegant trappings she recognized him who must be the King. Excited, she broke into a run, quite as though he were not Louis at all but some well-beloved and familiar uncle. The homelessness that had engulfed her throughout the journey hither sought release in this illusion. Coming to a dead stop before him, so that the top of her bonnet barely touched the King's nose, 'Toinette performed ballet-master Noverre's most beautiful curtsy.

King Louis was entranced.

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While yet he gasped at such refreshing effervescence the girl rose on her toes and kissed the old rascal on both cheeks.

King Louis felt his ancient heart go pit-a-pat. It seemed aeons ago since anything so young and innocent had voluntarily accorded him a natural caress. He blubbered with delight, throwing his arms about the doll-like creature and crushing her against his wheezing chest. Next, he presented her with his grandson, the Dauphin.

At sight of her husband, 'Toinette's enthusiasm flagged. She found herself unable to repeat the earlier impulsive gesture; she could not fall into this stranger's arms. Something, perhaps the memory of a handsome lad in Swabia, paralyzed her limbs.

The Duc de Berry did not mind. He disliked emotional outbursts, particularly where the female sex was concerned. With sullen eyes he glowered at 'Toinette; demonstrative maneuvers between himself and this unnecessary, though personable, bit of fluff were simply out of the question. For several years he had tolerated a theoretic fiancée, and now it would be a theoretic wife. Well, so be it! But that was as far as he would let the nonsense go.

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He was still brooding upon this distasteful matter when he experienced a well-placed poke against his ribs. It was the King, prodding his heir to comply with the amenities.

Berry complied. He stalked forward and executed a clumsy bow, brushing 'Toinette's uplifted face with his own beardless chin. Although bystanders could not be quite certain, it was merely the semblance of a kiss. Marie Antoinette described it in her first letter to Schönbrunn.

It would have been proper at this point for individual greetings to be exchanged with the King's daughters, Mesdames Rags, Sow and Cracklings, as well as with the royal favorite, Madame Dubarry. But with that quick impatience which characterized him, the monarch had had enough of preliminaries. A wave of his hand encompassed the royal company. Lumping them all together in a lot, Louis disposed of his extraordinary family circle.

"*Voilà les autres. Allons!*" he drawled in a bored voice. ("There are the others. Let's go!")

A moment later he had invited the Archduchess into his own carriage, with orders that the court break up at once and set out for Versailles.

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Again 'Toinette was in motion. This time she sat firmly entrenched between the portly King and his no less elephantine grandson. The vehicle jogged briskly over the furrowed highway toward Paris, raising a cloud of dust which fell with equal contumely upon the chariot of La Dubarry and that of the collective Aunts.

Occasionally, as the wooden wheels swerved off some crag or skipped a boulder, His Majesty pressed ominously toward the small 'Toinette. Had not the Dauphin retreated into the farthest corner, until he almost stretched up to the ceiling, there would have been little left of Archduchess Maria Antonia Josepha Johanna. The Hapsburg maid would have been smothered betwixt a willing and an unwilling suitor.

As it was, her exquisite Parisian frock was crumpled. On reaching Versailles it had to be ripped apart, ironed out and stitched together anew before being worn again.

The streets of Paris were crowded.

People from all walks of life shared in the anticipa-

tion of this day which brought a Dauphiness to France.

It was true that monarchy and its expensive trappings had of late been the target of criticism. Disgruntled orators and pamphleteers loudly deplored the prodigality that reigned in higher spheres. They raised angry fists against an idle, privileged, parasitic class that obviously did not toil or spin—yet just as obviously gorged itself upon the goods of the earth.

Even so, on this bright May morning of 1770 the plaint of underdog against lapdog was silenced by a sudden truce. For no matter what its grievance, the *canaille* of Paris loved a show. The first rumor that the Dauphin's bride was on her way to Versailles, where a marriage ceremony would be held with all the pomp and fanfare of a Roman holiday, caused a general jubilation that knew no bounds. Overzealous gossips carried the most garbled news through alleys and thoroughfares, reporting that all manner of blessings were at hand. The royal caravan, so ran one tale, left casks of wine and gold-filled purses strewn in its wake. Who would not welcome such a regal progress?

The lowly citizens of the Ville Lumière scrubbed

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their necks and brushed out their Sunday rags. Tattered urchins huddled together in doorways, waiting wide-eyed for the glorious pageant to begin. Their elders, embittered by privation and care, cast cynicism aside for yet another spell as young and old soared once again on the wings of a new hope.

From near and far the peal of church bells mingled in a message of joy, while devotees knelt smiling before altars and votive shrines, offering quick prayers of thanks.

And then the myth was dashed to pieces. The story of a sumptuous Parisian heyday proved to be false. The royal party had no intention of showing itself to the capital. Even as the eager rabble stood waiting, King Louis with his roistering escorts skirted the city and sped on to Versailles.

The palace gates were reached by late afternoon. Through the great gardens with their scintillating fountains the spangled and be-wigged company flew. Velvet-clad flunkies lined the esplanade and welcomed the exalted travelers who, unmindful of any wrong, leaped from their carriages in a rollicking mood. There was a wedding feast ahead! The Paris mob? No one gave it a thought. The untold thou-

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sands who that night recoiled in disappointment to their slum hovels had been forgotten; or rather, they did not exist. For King Louis and his revelers had other things to worry about: the palace folk must hurry and change clothes for the next cycle of pleasure.

That this was so could hardly be the fault of young 'Toinette. Accustomed to different conditions at home, where Viennese burghers took an intimate and nosey part in the most private affairs of their dynasty, she had no idea of the chill distance that separated a Bourbon from the rest of France. She felt no inkling, this day of her arrival, of the wide-spread rancor aroused by her own isolation. Quite innocently her slim shoulders were enlisted to share a burden of royal guilt. More than that; having been heralded with joyous acclaim, her aloof entry was misconstrued as personal hauteur. What manner of future queen was this, who disdained to visit her new capital? Had she no heart for the common people? Was France, perchance, not good enough? In less than a pulse-beat's quiver the public tenor changed. 'Toinette, the little foreigner lost and bewildered in an alien land, became a hateful symbol. Born im-

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perial, she was a perfect embodiment of aristocratic pride. She had been fashioned, as it were, to bear the cumulative blame for centuries of Bourbon snobbery.

It was indeed a pity that her brother Joseph had not come along. His infallible gift of showmanship would never have permitted such a tactical *faux pas*. No matter whether neglect or ridicule awaited him, Joseph never skirted a town. On the contrary, he headed straight for it. Nose to the ground, ears cocked for applause, he never missed anything. His roving eye peered down each street on the off chance that a friendly cheer might be forthcoming. In Joseph, Paris would have found its meat, for Joseph fed on popularity.

But he was back in Swabia, fraternizing with Duke Karl and looking for a sash. 'Toinette had no one to safeguard her against the first of many errors that would mark her life as Dauphiness and Queen. From the start her career in France was blighted by the bane of popular wrath.

She did not know this as she stood before her mirror early the next day (it was May 16th) to don a gold-embroidered wedding gown. Frightened, yet

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fully determined to behave her very best and to bring Austria no disgrace abroad, she descended the marble stairs, followed by a vast train of bridal attendants. At the portal of the *Roi Soleil's* famed chapel she faltered and paused to catch her breath. But the soft peal of organ music fortified her. Something familiar was being played—something she had heard before, perhaps from her teacher, Gluck. Now she was confident again, and her guileless bisque-doll face relaxed into a smile.

At the foot of the altar waited the Most Reverend Archbishop of Rheims. Before him on a satin pillow knelt the Dauphin, indifferent and drowsy, though his diary that morning bore the annotation that he had slept well. The Nuptial Mass began.

Before the ceremony had progressed very far an acolyte appeared, bearing a tray with thirteen golden coins—a bridegroom's "morning gift" offered in quit-tance for the immolation of maiden virginity. In the present case, since Berry lacked all interest in that commodity, a bit of economic brummagem was recorded. Marie Antoinette received something for nothing.

The service over, everyone gathered in the sacristy

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to witness the signing of the marriage contract. Headed by Louis XV, the principal participants and members of the royal family laboriously inscribed the roster. 'Toinette herself, biting her tongue, produced a lamentable autograph. Forgetting the complete French rendering of her name, she scribbled Josepha for Josephine and finished with an ignominious blot.

"*Ein Tintenklecks!*" exclaimed Empress Maria Theresia when she heard of it, "*welch' Unglück. . .*" ("A blotch of ink! What disaster. . .")

'Toinette thought so too. She looked up from the parchment with timid apprehension. Her cheeks flushed with embarrassment. She had certainly made a big blot which would forever accrue to the discredit of her beloved tutor, the Abbé Vermond. Yes, it was big and very black. As black as her own destiny.

A banquet followed in the mirrored *salle de spectacle*.

Covers had been laid for the King's blood-relations and the most important members of the court; two hundred and twenty persons, all told. Six thousand members of the upper social strata of France had furthermore been issued tickets of admission to a spec-

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tators' gallery which ran the length of the enormous dining hall. From this vantage point the onlookers, themselves unfed, were able to observe the royal collation. Their decorous abstinence was rewarded by a glimpse of the Bourbon *bouillabaisse*.

Outside, the garden paths and terraces had slowly filled with milling crowds. Neighborhood villagers came in a body to press against palace windows in futile hopes of spying upon the festival within. In wagonettes and char-à-bancs the landed gentry hovered near the gates, their horses neighing and stamping impatient hoofs. Even from Paris numerous stragglers appeared, tired by the four-hour journey, yet eager to stand up the rest of the night in order to witness the historic function.

A veritable bonfire of Bengal lights had been planned for the evening. But long before the appointed time a violent storm came up. The heavens opened and poured out such a torrent of rain that the miserable throngs dispersed. Everything was drenched: the country 'round about, the festooned regal park, the costly fireworks.

Still, nothing dampened the animation that reigned within. After some lordly gorging and guzzling the

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royal party turned from menu to minuet. King Louis was the first to trip the light fantastic. He seized the bride about her tiny waist and ambled with her across the polished parquetry, essaying a whirligig or two. Despite his asthma, and the interference of a sizable paunch, the effort went off neatly. His Majesty garnered a flock of compliments while Marie Antoinette was told that she would do.

Between dances Coco, the King's jester, appeared. Crouching at his master's feet, the hunchbacked minstrel recited a famous ballad of the day.

And again the eighty-piece orchestra held forth, calling the guests to a sprightly quadrille or to a more measured pavane. Madame Dubarry danced, as did the King's stiff and lugubrious daughters. Even the Dauphin gave evidence of rhythmic reflexes; he propelled his hulking frame about and hummed a tune, the while his brothers vied for a turn with the vivacious 'Toinette.

Toward midnight the Grande Polonaise took place and with it came the hour of the Aunts. Here was the moment they had waited for, the opportunity to plant the first poisoned dart against their enemy, Madame Dubarry. Already that morning, just before

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the wedding service, Rags, Sow and Cracklings had hovered about 'Toinette on the threshold of the church and pointed out the regal courtesan kneeling in the King's pew.

"That one over there," they whispered, "she is——"

But their formidable father had approached and disrupted the triologue. 'Toinette was swept away on a cloud of tulle and orange blossoms before the name of Dubarry had been pronounced.

Tonight, however, matters were different. Under the royal baldachin sat the grim sisters (Poor Silk having long since retreated to her convent). In their midst the Dauphin and his bride awaited the official presentation of every court member, prior to the great figure dance. Heading the list of those to be presented was the King's favorite, Countess Dubarry, who herself had waited in feverish suspense for this triumphant occasion. For the Dubarry had charming ways and she meant to be a devoted friend if the Dauphiness deigned to permit it.

At the far end of the vast ballroom the procession started. King Louis leaned forward on his throne and eagerly surveyed the proceedings through a long-

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handled Iorgnon. He wanted to make certain his fair Jeanne outshone the rest in elegance and style; a *maîtresse en titre* must bring her master honor. Louis owed this to himself and to his Hapsburg granddaughter-in-law, since it would never do for 'Toinette to write home to Vienna that Madame Dubarry was nothing much to write home about.

It was this preoccupation which caused the monarch to relax his surveillance of the Aunts who, in turn, made the most of their chance. Like wasps, *Loque*, *Coche* and *Graillon* buzzed about the Dauphiness, humming a song of hate. Their efforts proved effective. When Madame Dubarry approached to offer homage 'Toinette became suddenly engrossed in adjusting the bodice of her dress.

Smiling hopefully, the favorite waited. 'Toinette let her wait.

At this point King Louis emitted an ominous cough. But the Dauphiness merely turned an interested eye from her bodice to her fichu until at last the royal mistress took the hint. She stalked away, a figure of defeat.

The scene brought consternation in its wake. For months to come the chancelleries of Paris and Vienna

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would fret over a possible rift between their governments, while Maria Theresia remonstrated with her impertinent child. "After all," wrote the Empress, "you don't have to kiss her—just say something polite. . . ." In time 'Toinette would relent and, relenting, deliver history's most adroit snub. "Oh, my," she said one day, looking straight through the courtesan who made her seventeenth bow, "there are a lot of people here!" (*"Ma foi, il y a beaucoup de monde ici!"*) After which she never again addressed the Dubarry.

But fortunately this issue did not come to a head at the wedding party. The Grande Polonaise, already in progress, blotted out the momentary tension. Even King Louis dismissed his quick chagrin (he planned to deal with his womenfolk later) and entered once more into the festive spirit.

At length midnight struck and the celebration came to an end. Weary from so much exertion the monarch ordered the final march. Taking the lead, he nodded briefly to his court and, followed by the royal family, made a quick exit.

Before a small curtained door in the foyer he kissed Madame Dubarry's hand.

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On the first landing of the marble stairs he bade good night to his grandsons, Provence and Artois.

Another flight up he waved away the Aunts.

And now the fateful moment was at hand. Walking between the newlyweds, His Majesty led the way to the bridal chamber. Here, following precise tradition, the King himself fetched and laid out the Dauphin's nightshirt, spreading its folds invitingly across a chair. With even greater solicitude Louis would have handled Marie Antoinette's sleeping gown; but ceremonial decreed that a young married woman of the court, in this case the Duchesse de Chartres, must perform so delicate a rite.

Alas, there was no more that one could do. Reluctantly the old King turned to go. He fain would have lifted the coverlet and tucked the nestlings in, but there were limits even to the powers of an autocrat.

As worldly might departed, the clergy entered. Prince Louis de Rohan, Archbishop of Rheims, had come to bless the marriage bed so that with God's approval it might be rendered fruitful. While Marie Antoinette disrobed behind an alcove screen, the worthy ecclesiast stroked the pillows, uttering a fer-

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vid benediction. He pinned a scapulary to the billowing curtain. Next he turned up the cuffs of his lace tunic before lifting the lid off a portable holy water font. And now he intoned the psalmody of aspersion the while with sweeping gestures he sprinkled the blessed liquid from left to right. After the nuptial couch had been thoroughly doused, His Reverence assumed a pontifical expression and trailed majestically from the room.

In view of such scrupulous preliminaries, it certainly could not be laid at Heaven's door that on the morrow a placid Dauphin rose to scrawl a one-word résumé in his diary.

"*Rien*," was the bridegroom's summary report concerning this epochal night in his career. ("Nothing.")

The presence of an unsought sleeping companion had made no particular dent in his sensibilities. It was easy to ignore 'Toinette. Far more annoying had been the damp mattress, which one could not ignore. Even so, Berry's capacity for dozing surmounted every obstacle, including wet sheets; he had slept sweetly until dawn. If kings or statesmen hoped to remold his character, let them think again. It

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would require more complex alchemy than the passive allure of an innocent maid.

However, France and Austria had concluded a bargain, and the world dreamed a new dream of peace. Once again politics made strange bedfellows who, in turn, were destined to make even stranger politics. . . .



Cadenza at Sibyllengard



BACK in Swabia matters were still in an uproar.

A hectic day had transpired following the adventurous night when Castle Sibyllengard had been sacked. With many a convivial cup to wash down their troubles, Duke Karl and his company had gradually reached a state of happy insouciance regarding that *contretemps*, but toward dusk a dilemma occurred. The wine supply gave out.

This was hardly surprising in view of the demands made on ducal cellars during the past forty-eight hours. Still, it changed the complexion of things. As the grape diminished, tempers grew correspond-

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ingly less mellow. Before long the subject of the thieves came up once more for angry discussion and this time the Emperor ceased to be polite.

"I want those scamps strung up by their breeches," stormed His Majesty, pounding both fists on the table.

Duke Karl thought this a reasonable suggestion.

"And as for the jade that's with them," Joseph continued, "let her be exposed in the village stocks to learn the meaning of shame!"

Duke Karl thought this an even more reasonable suggestion. He added a few refinements to the proposed castigation of both the magicians and their lady companion. Other members of the imperial suite joined the debate and there soon developed a heated altercation as to the merits of one form of torture over another. This in turn shortened the tedium of waiting for reports from the police. With nothing else to do the would-be executioners sat in vicarious judgment over their still uncaptured prey, devising ever subtler penalties until the contest turned into a fascinating game.

They played it heartily and with zest. They were still playing it when night fell and a detachment of cavalry galloped through the palace gates followed by

Cadenza at Sibyllengard

the straggling band of prisoners in chains. A separate convoy brought up the rear, bearing the loot.

Instantly a loud cry echoed through the halls, making a mighty din.

“Praise be! The robbers have been caught!!”

There was a scurrying down corridors and stairways as everyone made for the portal where Perico Manoel and his accomplices stood huddled in a wretched group. Wearing his most fearsome scowl Emperor Joseph strode toward them in an avenging mood. The culprits expected the worst.

Yet as His Majesty glowered at Perico Manoel the latter's ashen face assumed so pinched and pleading an expression that Hapsburg fury collapsed within itself. Anger gave way to pity, and Joseph felt distinctly abashed. Perhaps, he reflected, one had better retreat and call upon Duke Karl to display the proper attitude of wrath. Even the gods on high Olympus employed a Thunderer to convey celestial ire. Yes, let Duke Karl step forward and demolish the felons with a suitable blast of maledictions.

His Majesty moved aside while His Grace shouldered the unwelcome task of meting out justice. This would have proved easier if the scoundrels themselves

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had been less likable and entertaining. Certainly they had made yesterday's party a success. Duke Karl could not suppress a feeling of gratitude for the gratuitous performance of Perico Manoel's black magic. Still, the theft of the ducal dinner ware had been gratuitous too. One must speak sharply about that.

"It was a shameful deed," scolded His Grace.

The gypsy leader cringed in misery and remorse. He waved his arms in a hapless gesture of despair while crocodile tears dampened his cheeks. With Latin eloquence he recited a tale of poverty and privation, of nights without shelter and days lacking even a crust of bread. It was a poignant story which would have drawn loud sobs from Perico Manoel's companions, had they not heard it many times before. Duke Karl grew palpably unnerved.

"Count the silver pieces," he ordered, striving to uphold the rôle of stern gendarme.

The loot was itemized and found to be complete. This circumstance in no way exonerated the thieves, though it caused Duke Karl to heave a sigh of relief, for he was at heart a benevolent man who ruled his Swabians with a gentle hand. Among his easy-going tenets of government there was one which always

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gave a knave the chance to change his mind about being a knave. If stolen goods were returned, the crime of burglary was automatically mitigated.

Of course in the present instance recovery of the booty was due to efficiency on the part of the ducal police rather than a voluntary impulse shown by the thieves themselves. But Duke Karl's resentment had already begun to dissipate into thin air. He beheld his mighty platters, his goblets, forks and favorite gravy spoon. And, lastly, there appeared the punch bowl reminiscent of the night's Lucullan feast!

It was too much. Joy drowned out bitterness in one hearty gasp of recognition. Beaming at his treasures, Duke Karl was ready to forgive and forget.

Emperor Joseph likewise seemed ready to call the matter off when suddenly a frown darkened his countenance.

"Where is my sash?" inquired His Majesty.

With obvious distress Duke Karl once again confronted the quavering Perico Manoel. In an imploring undertone His Grace harangued the swarthy one, urging him to behave like a good Swabian thief. Swabian brigands and swindlers, when caught, made a clean breast of things. It was the only way. It

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saved Württemberg prestige. Surely Perico Manoel had thought of that?

Yes, Perico Manoel had thought of it. But he did not have the sash. What was more, none of his vagabonds possessed it. Down to the last man, and including the girl Giselle, each member of the little band denied having gone near the Emperor's room.

"Your Majesty," they cried in chorus, falling to their knees at Joseph's feet, "what could we do with so useless a trinket as that? A sauce boat and a silver ladle can be pawned for seven gulden or maybe six. But a sash? There's not a copper to be gotten for a sash!"

Joseph was hurt. Never had a portion of the imperial apparel been so harshly spoken of. The pearl-embroidered riband (edged in gold fringe and caught with a jeweled bangle) was his pride and joy, and he resented being told that a scrubby pawnbroker might have no use for it.

At this point Duchess Frederica came to the rescue by offering a practical suggestion. On first meeting Perico Manoel she had doubted his wizardry; her skepticism had increased when he failed to conjure up a tent, though heaven knew he had been sorely in

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need of one. Well, here was a final opportunity for the charlatan to redeem himself: let him employ his abracadabra to advantage by producing the missing sash. This would not only save the honor of Sibyllengard (how else blot out the stigma that on its premises an emperor had been robbed?) but it would definitely convert Frederica to the sorcerer's art.

Even this inducement, however, had no effect upon the gypsy leader. With touching eagerness Perico Manoel offered to run the gamut of his repertoire, delivering ducks or paper flags in wanton profusion, but though the Devil were to take a lease upon his soul not one new cabal could be added to the lot. The same old mumbo-jumbo and the same old tricks followed each other in the same old order. The wizard called upon the spirits: he waved a wand, rang bells, conjured a book and candle. He sparkled with the evil eye. He exorcised and commanded the genii. The net result was not the reappearance of an emperor's sash, but the spouting of cold beads of sweat upon the exhausted Merlin's brow.

At this even Duke Karl's urbanity came to an end. Though he had hoped to pardon the rogues and send them on their way, the master of Sibyllengard clearly

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realized that his own good name was now at stake. What if the ducal plate had been recovered? What of the horses captured and returned safely to their stables? These things counted as nothing in the face of the Emperor's loss. There could be no talk of mercy, only of redress.

Flushing deeply, for he was sick with humiliation, the Duke uttered a brief command:

"Throw them into the dungeon!"

With loud wails and lamentations the prisoners were taken from the hall and dragged to the shadowy underworld below. A pall of gloom settled over the Swabian scene.

They might have remained there forever, locked in the bowels of Castle Sibyllengard, had not the Countess of Orlamünde resumed her midnight walks. . . .

A nervous sentry saw her shape wandering across the ramparts in the shadow of the moon. Frightened out of his wits he dropped his pike and helmet while racing up the portcullis for shelter.

"It was the accurséd one all right," stuttered the breathless man.

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"You are sure of that?" asked Herr Manfred who took ghost stories with a pinch of salt.

"Sure as I am that my name is Johann Polten. She came from out the tower and trailed a shimmering veil behind her. Many a time my grandsire described her thus, gliding along as if on a puff of mist."

In avid groups the listeners gathered 'round. They demanded details. Had the apparition bobbed up suddenly, nodding its head and making woeful sounds, as previous witnesses could testify? Had there been signs of weeping or the rattle of dried bones? The Countess was never known to go forth during the witching hour without her knitting needles; surely Polten must have heard them click as she went by. Besides, the metal would glisten in the moonlight—what had he to report about that?

Never in his forty-nine years of service had Johann Polten felt so important. This was his day of days and he resolved to make the most of it. He told his tale innumerable times, enlarging upon it at each new retelling, until at last there emerged an intricate and bloodcurdling yarn. Collaboration on the part of subsequent narrators served further to spin out the plot into a staggering history.

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Duke Karl and Duchess Frederica had just sat down to breakfast when they heard the latest Orlamünde gossip.

"What do you make of it?" inquired His Grace, shivering a bit.

"You are shivering a bit," said Frederica, who always began the day serene and poised.

He envied her composure. She seemed to feel no qualms concerning the knitting ancestor whose recent antics were troubling him. Though he pretended otherwise, Duke Karl dreaded the Orlamünde spook far more than did any of his subjects.

His subjects were lucky. They had no palaces to inhabit. They sat snugly in their village huts where young and old gathered 'round the hearth and chuckled with contentment while summing up the megrims and vicissitudes that plagued the rich. But he, who was hereditary Duke of Württemberg, found himself saddled with a family ghost.

"Well, what do you make of it?" repeated His Grace, stirring up the contents of his cup.

Frederica furrowed her brow. With a woman's flair for concrete deduction she dismissed the fanciful embroideries that obscured Polten's account. The

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Orlamünde wraith, according to the sentry's own testimony, had issued from the old tower. Very simple. One must investigate the tower.

"We shall probably find," Her Grace suggested curtly, "that this Giselle woman took a promenade after dark."

Yet even as she made this statement the Duchess recognized her own error. The girl Giselle had been locked up all night in the deep vault that ran under the moats of Sibyllengard; even had she wanted to, she could not have escaped and gained the ramparts for a moonlight stroll.

And now another thought struck Frederica, which caused her to shoot up from her chair. How could she have missed the answer for so long when there was but one key to the riddle?

"Wait!" she exclaimed, shaking a finger at her husband. Picking up her skirts, she bolted from the room.

Some minutes later the Duchess returned, a smile of triumph on her florid face. In her hands she clutched a riband of bright silk. Its edges were badly frayed and torn.

"Look," she cried, "the Emperor's sash!"

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Duke Karl looked. What he saw caused him to raise pained eyebrows and to purse his lips in a gasp of horror.

"In heaven's name, Frederica, what has happened?"

She held the riband up for his inspection. Its ravelled ends told a sad story.

"It looks," sputtered the Duke, "as though it had been chewed!"

Frederica breathed a sigh of resignation. "Great Aunt Clotilde, my dear, has been busy."

Her husband nodded comprehension. "I see," he murmured in dismay, "*charpie*—to bind the wounds of the world. . . ."

"Poor old Clotilde is preparing for another war," Frederica agreed, "you should see the lint piling up across her bedroom floor."

Duke Karl fell silent. A war would be on, he had no doubt of it, as soon as Emperor Joseph saw his sash.

Duke Karl was wrong.

As it happened, the Emperor awoke that morning in a cheery mood, for he had slept well and he had dreamed a charming dream of hunting in the Sem-

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mering woods. Life in a shooting box was royalty's highest *desideratum*! Though as a shot Joseph was no expert, there beat a sporting heart in his broad Hapsburg breast.

Now the imperial dream did not concern itself with the chase of either boar or chamois but with the more difficult task of bringing down a mountain eagle. As is customary when kings pull triggers—or perform in any other fashion for their public—all chance of failure is dispelled from the start, since it would never do for one so exalted over his fellow men to be exposed in the ignominy of defeat. When royalty appears on parade its every function must be rehearsed and carefully rewarded by organized applause. Thus, in keeping with this principle, Emperor Joseph's dream was actually no different from his waking hours. Unless perhaps a shade more comfortable.

Safe in the arms of Morpheus, he was to bag an eagle. Some distance from the royal ambush an experienced falconer carried a mighty bird, locked in a cage, to be released at the appointed moment when His Majesty finished loading a musket. Such practical foresight in no way diminished a Nimrod's thrill. Is not the quarry in modern fox-hunting twice cap-

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tured—first, to be led forth on a leash as bait, and then to run its desperate final race?

The Emperor's dream went off according to the rules. He brought down his bird and to the sound of bugles he trudged through the bush to gaze upon his prey. At this point an *impasse* had occurred, for the feathered creature lying on the ground seemed somehow unfamiliar to His Majesty. Whether through Joseph's ignorance of ornithology or because the falconer had been caught in an act of deception (eagles were costly and hard to get) the bird did not look like the King of the Mountains. To the Emperor it looked rather like an overgrown chicken.

"What sort of fowl is that?" the monarch asked.

"An eagle, Your Majesty," was the reply.

But Joseph did not allow himself to be taken in. He knew the Hapsburg coat of arms and the symbolic creature depicted therein. Eagle, forsooth!

"Away with you and your poor joke," boomed His Majesty with withering scorn, "an eagle has two heads!" ("Mi könnt's aber net pflanzen—a Adler hat ja zwei Köpf'!")

And on this salty note, roaring with laughter, the Emperor had awakened.

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He told the story to his equerry, Fiedler. And, coming downstairs, he told it to his aides. Duke Karl and Duchess Frederica would hear the *bon mot* next over their breakfast porridge. Everyone agreed that it was a corking jest; Joseph could hardly wait to tell it at Schönbrunn.

Of course, to the master and mistress of Sibyllengard the imperial dream proved nothing short of a boon. For the past half hour they had endured acute misgivings over the matter of the Emperor's sash. How to explain the gentle madness of Great Aunt Clotilde? How to apologize for the apparent negligence in letting an irresponsible old lady wander over the pinnacles of an otherwise respectable *Schloss*? And, worst of all, how to replace the damaged Hapsburg riband?

These questions seemed at first unanswerable. But now they began to lose their grave import. For the Emperor's jollity had banished all trepidation.

To everyone's relief, Joseph was so engrossed in his own conversation that he took scarcely any notice of Clotilde's handiwork. Quite casually he received from Frederica's hands the object of yesterday's frantic search. Even more casually he interrupted

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his own hearty flow of language to pause and put on his sash. True, the silk had got a trifle wrinkled and the jewel-studded bangle was missing, but Joseph was too busy to bother with such paltry detail. He had his dream to report. And, furthermore, he must give orders to pack prior to his return to Vienna.

So the Swabian jamboree ended. It had happened, in the first place, because an emperor disobeyed his mother; it went down in history, however, as one of mankind's most engaging drolleries. Maria Theresia alone would not be amused by Joseph's prank.

While the imperial palfreys were harnessed and the Hapsburg coach rolled from the mews, His Majesty took leave. With gallant click of heels Joseph bowed to Frederica, who executed her most decorous curtsy. To right and left of their mother, Dorothea and Apollonia gulped, fidgeted, stumbled over their own toes and managed finally to kiss the imperial hand.

Duke Karl and Prince Eugene escorted Joseph to the gate. While footmen piled the luggage high and scrambled to their appointed places, His Majesty and His Grace exchanged a final lordly hug. The Prince stood stiffly by, his hand raised in salute.

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Well, it had been a grand occasion. A marvelous time was certainly had by all.

"*Gott vergelt's!*" was Joseph's parting word. ("God repay you!")

"*Gott befohlen!*" came the ducal answer. ("God watch over you!")

There followed a clarion call, the rumble of wheels, a cloud of dust. . . .

The play was done. It had finished on a spirited note which at Castle Sibyllengard would not soon be forgotten.

Duke Karl went back to his fireside, a satisfied and happy man. He joined his family, as is the way with hosts after the guests have left, to talk over the feast. And all were pleased that matters had turned out so well: no one had come to harm, the Emperor had enjoyed himself, Sibyllengard had won a jewel of approbation for its modest coronet.

Duke Karl did not stint in giving accolades where accolades were due. He thanked his wife and daughters for the collaboration in a farce that might easily have gone amiss. He praised Herr Manfred and the staff of faithful palace servants. And lastly, he be-thought himself of the magicians. Rascals that they

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were, the picaresque adventurers deserved a measure of recognition.

"By the way," inquired His Grace, "where are those magicians?"

They were still locked up.

Well, someone must look into the matter and let them out. Duke Karl decided he would do so himself. He also decided to feed the wretches a last meal



and to send them happily on their way. Thus everyone would be content.

Or almost everyone. Of course there was Prince Eugene, who had not done very much and who had even less to say. After bidding goodbye to His Majesty, the boy quietly disappeared. No one had noticed him. In all the excitement of such a week as this the nephew of a reigning duke can be easily forgotten, even as the sister of an emperor had been for-

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gotten: nobody at Sibyllengard gave even a thought to little Marie Antoinette.

Nobody but Prince Eugene, who thought of nothing else. He thought of her sweet face as of a light gone out of his life forever. Farewell, 'Toinette——

Fate, unbeknown to him, finished the thought:

“Farewell, 'Toinette! They will not hear of you again in *Schwabenland* until your head rolls down into a trough. . . .”

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